IS Volume2

source : https://www.baka-tsuki.org/project/index.php?title=IS:Volume2

These are the novel illustrations that were included in volume 2

Okiura

弓弦イズル（ゆみづる・いずる）
ISのおかげで私が未踏の業界の方と
お知り合いになれました。
ありがとうIS。ISありがとう。

あと最近PCゲームの企画を弓弦名義で
ひとつやらせていただきました。

拍手コメントは元気の源！
作者ブログにてお待ちしております。
http://izurism.blog25.fc2.com/
拍手レスもあるよ！

Illustration

◎**okiura**（おきうら）
新進気鋭のイラストレーター。普段は擬人化メカ少女や魔法少女ものを好んでよく描く。
『白銀のローレシアン』（一迅社文庫）の挿絵を担当。
また、マクロスA（エース）にて「ノシ」名義で「マクロスF ～しーくれっとびじょんず～」を連載中。

カバーイラスト／okiura　装丁／伸童舎

MF文庫 J
ゆ-01-02

IS〈インフィニット・ストラトス〉② 弓弦イズル

MEDIA FACTORY
580

ISBN978-4-8401-2870-4
C0193 ¥580E

9784840128704

1920193005806

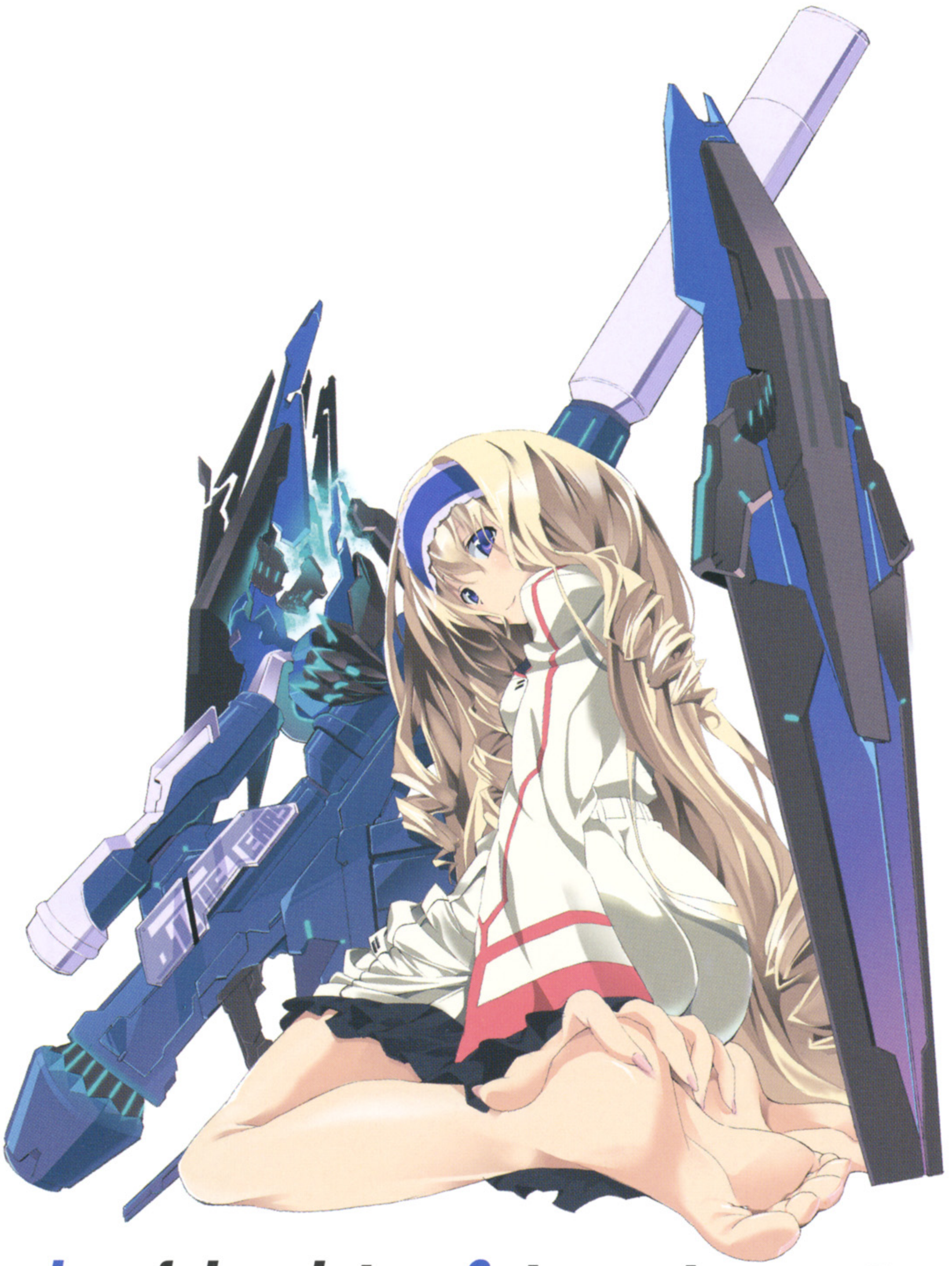
定価：本体580円（税別）
メディアファクトリー
MEDIA FACTORY

IS〈インフィニット・ストラトス〉②

「学年別個人トーナメントで私が優勝したら、付き合ってもらう！」
箒の宣言に困惑しながらも、一夏は今までどおり女の子だらけの学園生活を
送っていた。そんな中、IS学園に二人の転校生がやってくる。
しかもそのうちの一人、フランス代表候補生・シャルルはなんと男子！
ようやく男の友達が出来ると喜ぶ一夏だが、もう一人の転校生、
ドイツ代表候補生・ラウラに突然その頬を張り飛ばされる。
「私は認めない。貴様があの人の弟であるなど、認めるものか」
早くも人気沸騰のハイスピード学園バトルラブコメ、波乱必至の第二弾！！

MF文庫 J 弓弦イズルの本

IS〈インフィニット・ストラトス〉［イラスト：okiura］
IS〈インフィニット・ストラトス〉② ［イラスト：okiura］



InfiniteStratos 2

Izuru Yumizuru

「やはり敵ではないな。
この私とシュヴァルツェ・レーゲン（黒雨）の前では、
貴様も有象無象の一つでしかない。――消えろ」

ラウラ・ボーデヴィッヒ

ドイツ代表候補生
専用ＩＳ【シュヴァルツェア・レーゲン】

シャルル・デュノア

フランス代表候補生
専用ＩＳ【R-リヴァイヴ・カスタムII】

CHARACTERS

CECILIA ALCOTT

ICHIKA ORIMURA

HOUKI SINONONO

RININ FAN

77

contents

第一話 ボーイ・ミーツ・ボーイ 7

第二話 ルームメイトはブロンド貴公子（ジェントル） 52

第三話 ブルー・デイズ／レッド・スイッチ 128

第四話 ファインド・アウト・マイ・マインド 227

エピローグ 深なる紅（あか）のまどろみより 314

あとがき

弓弦先生2巻発売
オメデトウゴザイマス！
そして、手に取ってくださった方々
ありがとうございます。
本編じゃ絶対しそうにない
ポーズのセシリアさん
です。

CHOCO

2
INFINITE
STRATOS
インフィニット・ストラトス
弓弦イズル
YUMIZURU Izuru
Illustration: CHOCO
OVERLAP

IS 2

INFINITE STRATOS

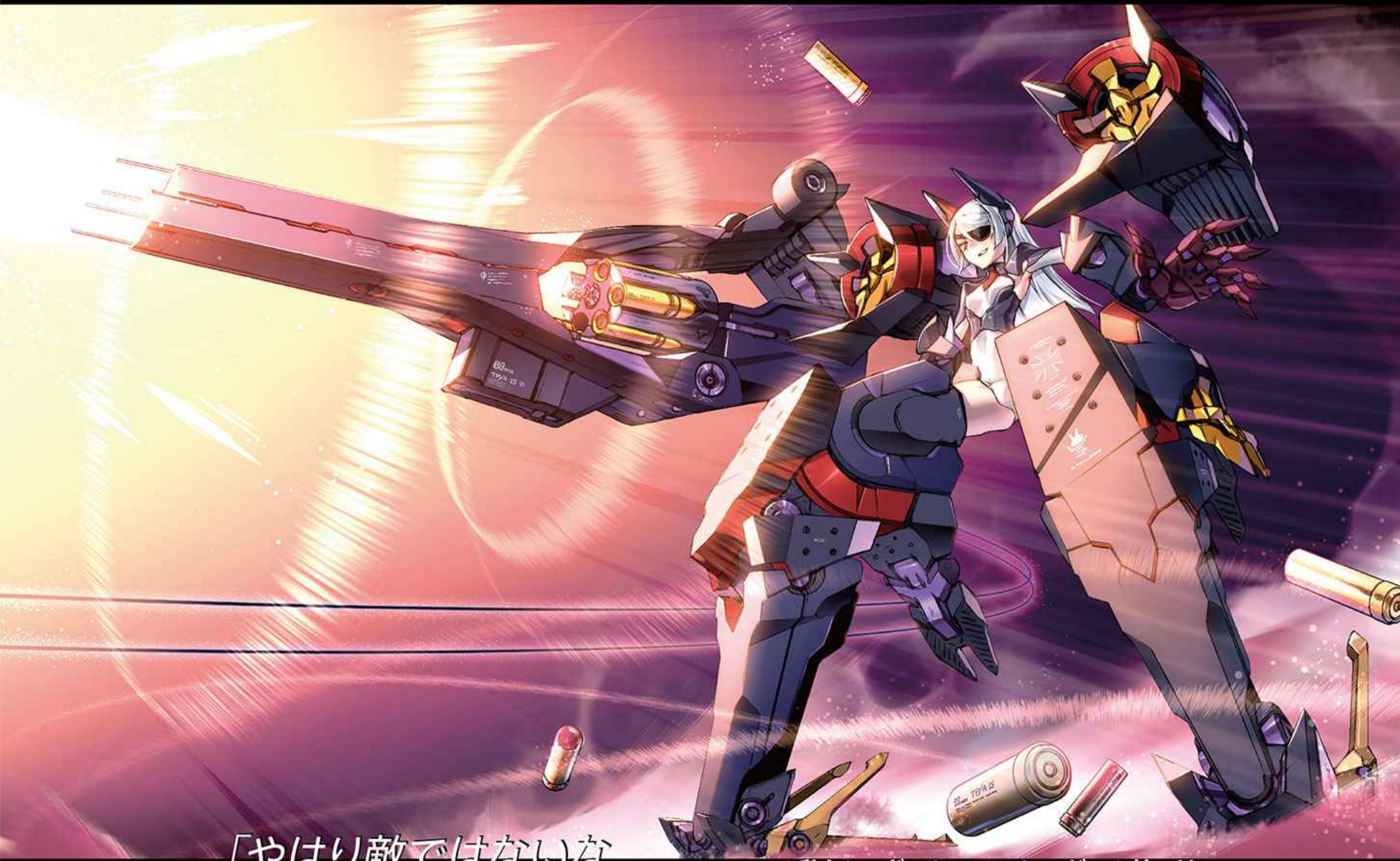
インフィニット・ストラトス2

弓弦イズル
YUMIZURU Izuru
Illustration: CHOCO

セシリア「さあさあ一夏さん、どうぞおひとつ！」

箒「ほ、ほら、食べてもいいぞ」

鈴「ま、まあ、あれよ。食べさせてあげるわよ。
ほら食べなさいよ！」



「やはり敵ではないな。

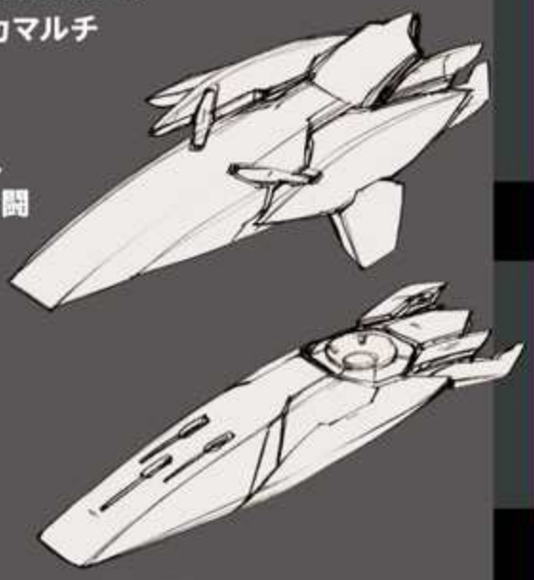
この私とシュヴァルツェア・レーゲンの前では、
貴様も有象無象の一つでしかない。ー消えろ」

ラファール・リヴァイヴ・カスタムII

機動性を重視したカスタムIから大幅な
改修が加えられ、攻撃、防御両面の強化
を図って、パイルバンカー内蔵型の腕部
シールドを装備された。シャルルの高い技量を生かすため汎用性を捨て、
腰部スラスターベースの六基の拡張コネクタには四基の高出力マルチ
ウィングスラスターと二基の小型推進翼が接続されている。

シャルルのスキルである『ラピッド・スイッチ』に対応するため、
バススロットには高速化処理が施されている。これにより、戦闘
行動中の装備の全換装や、連続射撃と同時の給弾ができる
ため、リヴァイヴ量産型に比べて高い戦闘能力を持っている。

兵装の全てを火薬式実弾で統一してるため、
一年生の専用機の中では抜群の燃費を誇る。



和名：疾風（しっぷう）
型式：RR-08/s2
世代：第二世代
国家：フランス
分類：全距離対応万能型
装備：物理シールド（腕部装備型）
パイルバンカー『灰色の鱗殻（グレー・スケール）』
アサルトライフル『ヴェント』
他多数
装甲：衝撃吸収性サード・グリッド装甲（特殊軽量化仕様）
仕様：大容量バススロット（ハイスピード・コール仕様）、マルチウェポンラック

RAFALE REVIVE CUSTOM II

II

The Anatomy of Infinite Stratos

シュヴァルツェア・レーゲン

SCHWARZER ROEGEN

ドイツ製の第三世代型ISであり、最新鋭の試験技術を多く用いながらも高い完成度と優れた実戦能力を持が、機体の反応値が高く設定されているため常人には扱えない。

近距離では手首に装備されたプラズマ手刀、中距離では肩部と腰部に搭載されたワイヤーブレード、遠距離では右肩部の大口径リボルバーカノンを用いて、全ての距離で戦えるように仕上げられている。

腕部から放出されるAIC（アクティブ・イナーシャル・キャンセラー）は、対象物の周辺空間に慣性を停止させる領域を展開することで、動きを封じることができる。

リボルバーカノン：

口径88mmの実弾を火薬で射出する長距離兵器。一見古典的な兵器だが、推進用の液体火薬をリボルバーシリンダー内でプラズマ臨界寸前まで加熱させ、発射時にはバレル内のレールガンで追加速させるという、ISにしかできない高次元のプロセスで弾頭を射出する。脚部にはアイゼンが装備され、その大反動を支える銃架として機能する。

和名：黒雨（くろさめ）
型式：S-r.01
世代：第三世代
国家：ドイツ
分類：全距離対応強襲型
装備：プラズマ手刀x2
大口径リボルバーカノン
ワイヤーブレードx4
装甲：ルナーズメタル・ヘキサ合板装甲（対ビーム仕様）
仕様：アクティブ・イナーシャル・キャンセラー（慣性停止結界）

Cecilia ALCOTT **Right**

Left Lingyin HUANG

織斑一夏 おりむら・いちか

Ichika ORIMURA

世界で唯一ISを動かせる男子。
専用IS【白式】

篠ノ之箒 しののの・ほうき

Houki SHINONONO

6年ぶりに再会した幼なじみ。
専用ISなし

セシリア・オルコット

Cecilia ALCOTT

イギリス代表候補生
専用IS【ブルー・ティアーズ】

凰鈴音 ファン・リンイン

中国代表候補生
専用IS【甲龍】

Lingyin HUANG

シャルル・デュノア

フランス代表候補生
専用IS【ラファール・リヴァイヴ・カスタムII】

Charles DUNOIS

ラウラ・ボーデヴィッヒ

ドイツ代表候補生
専用IS【シュヴァルツェア・レーゲン】

Laura BODEWIG

5 第一話 ボーイ・ミーツ・ボーイ

46 第二話 ルームメイトはブロンド貴公子（ジェントル）

122 第三話 ブルー・デイズ/レッド・スイッチ

221 第四話 ファインド・アウト・マイ・マインド

308 エピローグ 深なる紅（あか）のまどろみより

件名	日付
【祝】第2巻発売！	：2013/ 杉花粉全開
□ラフ □クリンナップ ■あとがき	時刻 ：すずめが チュンチュン。

CHOCO
MUGITANI KOICHI
chocolateshop@mac.com
http://chocolateshop-float.com

食欲と紳士欲を刺激してくれる作品、IS。
食べ物が丁寧に書かれる作品は良い作品です。僕は酢豚と鯖味噌が食べたくなりました。次は寿司を作品に登場させる為に築地までロケハンに行きましょう弓弦先生！

お風呂シーンは描いていてとっても楽しいです。（そして早いです）温泉にロケハンに行く必要もありますね。

CHOCO

アニメ版の設定を元にデザインを模索していた頃に描いたオルコットさん。

Chapter 1:Boy meets Boy

On the first Sunday.

I went outside IS Academy--or more accurately, I went to Gotanda's residence.

"So?"

"So? So...what?"

Ugh, talking to me while we're playing a fighting game! Cheh, UWAH!! A super move on me! Damn you, don't get cocky!

"C'mon, of course I'm talking about the all-girls school. There should be many good things over there, right?"

I've told you so many times, no! How many times must I say it before you get it?

Let me explain. Gotanda Dan here, is a friend of mine from middle school. The day we first met, we kicked it off quite well. Also, during those 3 years, Rin and us were in the same class, so during middle school, the 3 of us often hung out together...

"Stop lying. I can tell that you're lying from those messages! What, don't you have a ticket to that kind of Heaven?"

Who would, you idiot?

The school I'm studying at right now is a special independent High School that's managed by the country--'IS Academy'.

IS--formally called 'Infinite Stratos', is a multipurpose unit that was designed for space exploration, but right now, it's used on earth, and it's even used by many countries for military weapons.

The person who invented the IS was the older sister of that childhood friend of mine, who seems to be hiding something. It's really hard to explain it, so I won't. The thing is that IS can 'only be used by women'.

On a side note, I'm just a normal boy.

But for some reason, I--Orimura Ichika, am half-forced to study in IS Academy as the only 'male' in the world who can pilot IS, so right now, I'm living a dormitory life with all the students, teachers and staff, who are female.

"Speaking of which, about that, it's great that Rin transferred in, otherwise i wouldn't have many people to talk with..."

"What? You're talking about Rin? Rin..."

Hm? What? Why is this he sneering at me? He's so weird.

"Alright, I win!"

"WAH! USELESS STUFF! WHO WOULD USE SUPER MODE TO KILL AT THE END~~..."

On a side note, we're playing 'IS/VS'. It's a game that broke a million sales within one month. Oh yeah, the game uses the second Mondo Grosso data.

...Well, for some reason, Chifuyu-nee's data wasn't included in it.

"Italy's Tanbesta's really powerful! Or rather, really violent."

"You should change characters once in a while. Like England's Milton or something?"

"Nope. That one's ridiculously hard to use, her moves are weak, and even the combos are weird."

Oh yeah, as the company that produced this game was from Japan, one could expect the other countries to voice their discontentment, saying 'Our countries aren't that weak!'.

Thus, the harassed video game company actually increased the specs of each IS in its respective country, and sold them separately in 21 countries. They managed to sell it well just because of that.

Speaking of which, to actually manage to make 21 versions of the same game just by tweaking the specs, they sure can earn lots here.

But in the World Cybergames Tournament, every country wanted to use their own country's version and started arguing over it until the tournament was terminated.

"Then, let's get back on topic. As for Rin--"

Just as Dan, for whatever reason, brought Rin up again , someone interruped him.

"Onii[2A 1], hurry up and come eat already. Lunch is ready--"

Kicking the door down and walking in is Dan's little sister--Gotanda Ran. She's a year younger than him, and is now in her senior year of middle school. She's said to be an honour student in a prestigious private girls' school . Hm, she's really different from her older brother.

"Ah, hi, long time no see. Sorry for disturbing you here ."

"I-Ichika...san!?"

As expected, girls dress up like this when they're at home, huh? Ran's shoulder-length hair is tied back with only a hair clip holding it from behind, and she's wearing shorts and a sleeveless vest. It's really a get-up that focuses on functionality.

But maybe I've gotten too used to it, since at IS Academy, I sorta see everyone dressed up so skimpily.

And maybe because the weather's been getting too hot lately, the girls have been wearing clothes with a low neckline, and besides, in such an environment where

there's no guys other than me looking, it seems like no one wears any bras indoor, either due to liberty or to openness. To be honest, the awkwardness of having 'girls finding me blocking my eyes while being unable to decide on where to look' can't be described.

"I-It's not that, well, you were here...? I heard that you went to a boarding school..."

"Oh, that's right. I had something to do today, so I went out. I wanted to check up on my house, so I thought that I should drop by."

"I, I see..."

However, Ran's always been like this. Why is it that she would stutter and sound so respectful all of a sudden ? That's weird.

"Ran, you could at least knock, right? You'll be considered a shameless woman--"

Kling! Ran instantly shot a glare.

Oh! Dan curled up already like Super Ma**o. The difference in battle prowess between those two is obvious.

"...Why didn't you tell me that he would be here..."

"Oh, wait, I didn't tell you? Sorry, my bad. Ah hahahaha..."

"..."

Klong! Ran again shot a glare at Dan with the intensity of a knife being thrown at a corpse, and then frantically left the room.

"If, well, if it's alright, please join us for lunch, Ichika-san! You aren't leaving yet, right?"

"Oh, sorry for the inconvenience. Thanks."

"It, it's alright..."

BAM! After Ran slammed the door shut, silence then filled the air.

Speaking of which, what about a skit of the ' Hot-blooded Siblings Dan and Ran?' Can't they air it on the Sunday morning timeslot? Most likely not.

"But I have to say, I've known Ran for 3 years, and yet it seems like she won't open up to me."

"Ha?"

Allow me to go off-topic for a while. Don't you feel that guys who call younger girls with a 'chan' are impressive? I can't do it, even if it's my friend's little sister. I have reservations about it, which is why I prefer to call them by their names.

Now that I recall it, the person involved did say 'It-It's okay' and agreed to it.

"That's not it. Don't you find that she's rather courteous to me? She just left the room so quickly."

"..."

Well, Dan sighs, and then exhaled.

"...What?"

"Nothing. Sometimes, I really wonder if you're like this on purpose."

"?"

"Well, it's good if you don't notice it. I don't wanna have a younger brother at my age."

"What are you talking about a younger brother, that came out of nowhere? That's ridiculous."

"Oh well, it's nothing. Anyway, wanna go out after lunch?"

"Oh, that's great. So you're treating me to lunch? **Thank you~**[2A 2]"

"What are you getting so worked up for, we're eating the leftover set meals."

I see. So we're eating that super sweet pumpkin stew set meal. But even so, I won't throw it away; things like rice are earned with so much hard work, so I have to be thankful to the uncles who worked in the fields.

"Let's go downstairs then."

We left Dan's room and headed downstairs, through the back door and then took a turn to the front door of the dining area.

Even though it's troublesome, Dan did say before that ' thanks to this set-up, our private lives won't be affected by the business'. Normally to people, the definition of a family is just to make the people who're staying in the house feel comfortable. Doesn't anyone feel that a house that's set up so nicely in TV is hard to live in? No wait, the most important thing is that the residents find it comfortable. I'll leave out the rest.

"Eiyah!"

"Hn?"

"..."

Dan let out that voice of disgust, and I peered over from behind him to look.

Our lunch's already prepared and laid out on the table, and someone's already sitting there.

"What? You have some complaint? If you want to, onii can go eat alone outside."

"Did you hear that, Ichika? Those super gentle words make me wanna cry!"

Sitting over there is Ran. And I suppose it isn't really brotherly of me to play along with Dan who's acting like he's wiping his tears off.

"It should be alright for us to have lunch. Besides, there are other customers around. Let's hurry up and sit."

"That's right, baka nii[2A 3], hurry up and sit down."

"Okay okay..."

And thus, I, Dan, and Ran sat down in order at the table...hm? That's weird.

"Ran."

"Wh-what is it?"

"You changed clothes? Are you going out later?"

"Ah, it's nothing. That's because...well, this, that..."

Ran's home get-up disappeared, and she let her hair down, giving off an impressive shine. As it's June, she's wearing a short-sleeved dress. The body that's covered by a thin clothing gives off the radiance of a teenager's youthful legs underneath the dress. As for the black

stockings that look like some decoratives, those who are into that should really like this, right? Well, I'm not really sure about it.

"I got it!"

I thought of it, and a light bulb seems to light above my head.

AFTER

BEFORE

"Are you going on a date?"

BAM!

"That's not it!"

Woah! She stood up to deny it! This is bad, did I step on a landmine or something? They say that the Japanese lack awareness in terms of danger; I will die if this is a battlefield. I really lament my own immaturity.

"So-sorry."

"Ah, it's nothing...an-anyway, it's not a date."

"And you say that you're not. As your older brother, that's the last thing I want to hear from you. Besides, it's only once in a few months that you would dress up like that--"

PA!

The iron claw strikes over. Is that the so-called shut-up attack? She's actually holding down Dan's breathing;

that's a scary technique, where did she learn it from? The famous private girls school even teaches assassination skills to go along with self-defense?

"...! ....!"

"(Klu klu klu!)"

And then, both of them exchange looks. Dan's giving a painful look of a criminal begging for forgiveness, nodding away at Ran, who's glaring at him with an ice queen glare.

Even so.

"Well, you two have quite the nice relationship here."

""HAA!?""

Ohh, their voices finally overlap! On a side note, the word 'harmo' (overlapping voices) came from the word ' harmony'. Well, can't they just use the word 'mony' (resounding voices)? Or if they want to, 'harmy' (overlapping sounds) can do.

"You brats, if you don't want to eat, hurry up and get out."

"Ku, we're eating, we're eating!"

Silently appearing without anyone noticing is the head of the Gotanda family that runs the Gotanda eatery, Gotanda Gen, who's still in great shape despite being over 80. His long-sleeved cooking uniform is rolled up to the shoulders, revealing his muscular biceps. He can move two Chinese woks at one go, and those biceps are tanned due to the exposure to heat after so long. This really feels healthier than going to the beach 100 times.

On a side note, I've gotten punched by him a few times , but the power definitely can't lose to Chifuyu-nee. Well, better start eating.

"Itadakimasu."

"Itadakimasu."

"Itadakimasu..."

In order, the ones who said those were me, Ran, and Dan.

"Oh, start eating."

Grandpa Gen nods in a rather satisfied manner as he continues to fry another dish. It seems like some customers ordered a Gotanda's eatery specialty 'Wildfire Roasted Vegetables'--and there's a double entendre to it. *Tatatatatatatata*, the light-hearted sound of the vegetable knife being knocked down can be heard from the kitchen.

With the sound of the vegetables being fried acting as background music, we start to talk while eating. If we continue to eat and talk, the iron wok will fly over, so we have to follow the customs here.

"Oh yeah, Ichika. You said you and Rin...eh, and who else? The first childhood friend? So you reunited with her?"

"Oh, Houki."

"Houki...? Who's that?"

"Hm? She's my first childhood friend."

And so Rin's the second childhood friend.

"Ah, that..."

For some reason, Ran's expression just got somehow stiff. Was there a same-sex repulsion because their names are so similar? Hold on, does same-sex repulsion refer to this?

"Oh yeah, Houki and I once lived in the same room, but we are no longer--"

BAM!

"IN, IN THE SAME ROOM?"

For some reason, Ran got confused and stood up without a warning, as the chair behind her collapses backwards.

"What, what's going on? Calm down."

"Yeah, you should calm down there."

Klang! With another sharp glance, Dan seems to have shrunk like Super Ma**o.

On a side note, grandpa Gen really dotes on Ran. If we were to flip the chair like what she did, the ladle would have flown over.

"I-Ichika-san? Living in the same room...that means, you ate and slept together?"

It's really an old saying, but Japan has always been a country that values traditions, so Ran's actions can be considered a virtue--report over, I end this report without even understanding what I just said.

"Hm, maybe. Ah, but that was until the end of last month. We aren't staying in the same room now, and that's to be expected."

Today's fried beancurd's really good--

"You, you two stay--stayed together for more than one and a half months?"

"Mn, sort of."

BAM... I seem to hear a huge blow, or maybe that's my imagination.

Speaking of which, Dan-kun, can you please tell me why are you sweating crazily? Do you really have skin that sweats a lot?

"...Onii, we'll talk later..."

"Well, I-I'm going out with Ichika later, so...hahaha..."

"Then, tonight."

A tone that doesn't allow any refusals. I remember that Ran's the student council chairman in the school of ojous[2A 4], so she got affected by them? Anyway, for some reason, I find her intent really sharp.

"...I've decided."

Yes, what did you decide on?

"I'm taking the IS Academy entrance exam next year."

Gakunk!

"What, what are you saying--"

Bikonsu--gan!

Wow! The ladle hit Dan directly on the face, and the floor trembles due to the chair falling backwards.

"Wha? Why do you want to go there? Isn't Ran's school a direct path to university? Can't you get into some super good university?"

It's just that I can't remember the name of that school.

"No problem. I can get in with just my grades."

"But IS Academy doesn't accept school recommendations..."

Dan wavers as he stands up. Though his Hit Points are low, he recovers fast--that's the hidden skill of Dan. However, that's meaningless anyway.

"Unlike my onii, I just need a notebook."

"No, but...that, that's right, Ichika! They have a practical test right?"

"Hm? Ohh, that's right. There's a 'IS initiation test', and it seems like those who aren't suited at all will be rejected ."

On a side note, the initiation test basically estimates how the candidate would start, and then uses the result to set the level of the candidate when they enter the school. My battle with the instructor (and apparently, it was Yamada-sensei) was like that.

"..."

Ran silently takes a piece of paper from her pocket, and Dan receives it and opens it.

"Gack!"

What, what just happened? Did Guan Yu just arrive? I haven't even heard the gong!

"IS suitability test...result--A..."

"Problem solved."

Wooah! That's a cool line! I want to say that at least once in my lifetime.

"That seems to be some test for those interested, right? I remember the government used it to gather IS pilots."

"That's right! It's free."

It's free. It doesn't matter whether there's too much of it as long as it's free. Grandpa Gen continues to nod away .

This person really dotes on Ran...

"So, so then,"

Ahem. Ran clears her throat and gently returns back to her seat.

"So, so Ichika-san, please guide me through as my senpai..."

"Oh, okay, that's if you get in."

The moment I agreed heartily, Ran happily stood up.

"Then, it's a promise. You must, definitely, definitely abide by it!"

"Oh, okay?"

I got held down somewhat by her pressure and nodded twice.

"Hey, Ran! How can you just choose to transfer schools like that!? Isn't that right, mom?"

"It's okay, there's no problem. Ichika-kun, I'll leave Ran to you then."

"Oh, okay."

Speaking of which, Gotanda Ren-san's the self-proclaimed mascot of the Gotanda eatery. Her age's a mystery, and it's said that 'my age won't increase after 16'. She still maintains a smiling face--people would say that a smile can make them prettier than their actual looks, and that's true. She's really a huge beauty today.

"WHAT'S WITH THAT!?"

For some reason, Dan was getting agitated alone. Who are you going up against?

"ARGH! I CAN'T TAKE IT! DAD'S NOT EVEN AT HOME AT THIS TIME! IS THIS REALLY ALRIGHT, GRAMPS!?"

"Ran made the decision herself. Nobody else has the right to argue."

"No, but--"

"What, Dan, you have any comments about it?"

"Nothing--"

Ahh, this guy's really weak. If it was me, even if the other person's a relative, I would viciously argue back when I have something to say.

"Do you really think that you can beat your own sister ?"

Yes, I do remember how my only relative is like. Pardon me, please allow me to take that back.

"Well, that's decided. I'm done."

Unknowingly, Ran finished her meal, stacks the chopsticks neatly, place her hands together to say grace, and stands up from the seat. Of course, you have to clear your own dishes.

Ohh, Ran may become a good wife in the future. Anyone who becomes her husband in the future should have a good life.

"Ichika."

Dan cautiously brings his face over, and for some reason, whispers to me,

"You better get a girlfriend now, immediately!"

"What?"

"Hah?"

"What do you mean by that, hurry up and get one! This year--no, in this month!"

Why is this guy so agitated all of a sudden? Oh yeah, let me add on. I heard that bulls can't recognise red, right ? It's said that humans will get excited by the red cloth, not fighting bulls. I see.

"I have no interest on that."

"You haven't changed at all...you're a withered old man! Because of you, Rin--"

"What's with Rin?"

"No, never mind, Anyway, no matter who it is, hurry up and get a girlfriend! Got it? You hear me?"

What's this guy planning to do? Speaking of which, how did this conversation begin in the first place?

"Speaking of which. Since when were you interested in girls? I know, you're the kind that finds yourself cool and popular, right? Stop messing around, you bastard!"

"What are you getting so angry for?"

"I'm not!"

Doesn't sound convincing. You're the kind who'll shout 'I'm not drunk' when drunk, right? Well, I don't really know myself. I've never drank alcohol anyway.

"Onii."

That's strange, Ran came back. For some reason, I feel the air temperature drops.

"Oh, ooooooo, I'm here, whhhhhaaaattt's up?"

Dan's trembling, is he feeling cold?

Thus, I turn to look at Ran.

--For a moment, just for a moment, I clearly saw an Asura embedded deep in her eyes.

'Don't get involved in this'

Her eyes are clearly saying this. As for the guys who came here to watch, it seems like she can just use a finger --or just a glance to knock them down.

"We-well, I'm leaving then."

Finally recovering, Ran hurriedly leaves.

Dan is stunned. Was he just frozen? Well, doesn't matter, the weather today is warm, so he should thaw out soon.

"Oh yeah, almost forgot. I can't let the food that others have prepared for me go cold."

Though the pumpkin stew's as sickeningly sweet as ever, the flatfish that's cooked together with chili tastes just right. How can I make such a perfect taste? Better get them to teach me next time, I should let Chifuyu-nee try this.

"...The...face..."

"Hm?"

"WHY ARE YOU SO POPULAR!? IS IT THAT FACE? IS THAT FACE THE COOL AND POPULAR KIND? I

HAVE THE COOLNESS, SHARE SOME OF THE POPULARITY WITH ME!"

That's enough! Stop uttering rubbish.

"YOU'RE TOO NOISY, DAN!"

"Yes, I'm sorry."

With grandpa Gen shouting, Dan quickly kneeled down on the chair and greets. That's a product of good teaching, or rather, training? Besides, after training for so long, even the king of beasts can leap through a fire hoop .

"Ichika, I'll battle with you later."

"Yeah sure, what?"

"Air hockey."

He actually chose something he has lost 10 straight times in. Is this the so-called not admitting defeat...such he's prepared, no problems!

"Don't think I'm the same man from middle school, Ichika!"

With burning flames rising up behind him, he looks like a dragon who's about to fly into the sky. Expecting a fierce battle, I tightly clench my slightly trembling left hand.

"Ahh...my hand's all numb now..."

Maybe I thought too much, as there wasn't a rising dragon. Just today alone, I managed to increase my winning streak to 16 times. Speaking of which, Dan, more than half of the wins were suicides on your own part...

"..."

It's past 6 now, and having returned to my dorm room, I'm lying on the bed, resting. I shake my arm that's somewhat tired and naturally look towards the bed beside me.

Houki was still there last week, and now she moved to another room. I guess it's too big for one person.

"Uun..."

But why did she say that all of a sudden?

I remember the day when she switched rooms--just when I thought that she was coming back, she suddenly made a declaration and then ran away like an escaping rabbit like a tornado just swept by.

(And the Individual Division tournament she talked about is in this month...)

I check the calendar that's hanged on the wall.

The individual division tournament--

As its name indicates, it's an individual tournament, and it will be held the entire week. As for the reason why , it's because everyone's required to take part.

Each grade has about 120 students. As there are so many people taking part in it, the scale of this tournament's pretty big. The school will use this chance to assess the talent level of the first years, the growth and learning abilities of the second years, and the in-depth combat abilities of the third years.

The third year tournament is all the more important--forget about the scouts from the IS related enterprises, even the high-ranked officials of all the countries seem like they will be here. This makes me realize and admire that fact that I've really entered an amazing school.

(Well, anyway, got to work hard. I have to be active enough so that I can be at least on a level where I can at least make Chifuyu-nee proud.)

Last month, the class representative tournament was suspended for that attack, and everyone got ordered not to say anything about it. As for me, Cecilia, and Rin, who fought the enemy directly: we were even forced to sign an oath.

(What was that anyway?)

Even though I can't understand it even if I continue to think about it, I still can't stop myself from thinking about it.

Suddenly, I raised the right hand that I used to play with just now and brought it in front of me.

Rolling up the sleeve, the gauntlet that's was strapped onto the skin reveals itself.

That's the standby mode of my IS 'Byakushiki'.

It's really hard to imagine that it's the control for some really powerful weapon. In standby mode, it's extremely quiet, or rather, it's asleep, though I don't really know whether it has the idea of sleeping.

(At that time, Byakushiki told me that 'that's unmanned'.)

Though I tried so hard that I forgot about myself, but I could still feel it. On a retrospective, I recall that there was something that felt like a 'report'. It seemed like Byakkushiki sent it to me.

Even though there's no concrete evidence, I had that feeling.

(Oh well, can't change anything now no matter how much I think about it. Better go get dinner.)

I get up from the bed and walk towards the door. Just as I'm about to put my hand on the door handle, I can hear some knocking on the door.

"Ichika, are you there?"

"Yeah."

The moment I opened the door, I see Rin standing there.

"Do, don't just open the door like that so suddenly! That scared me!"

Huang Lingyin, my second childhood friend. She's the pilot of the personal IS 'Shenlong', and she was my classmate before she went back to her home country. She has the lively twin ponytails and a flat chest--ha, better not think about it. For some reason, my thoughts are often being seen through, so I'm rather mindful about that recently.

"Wh-why are you staring at me like that..."

"Oh, it's nothing, nothing at all."

I said that as there was really nothing wrong, but Rin muttered 'I'm alright with that...'. What does she mean by that?

"Oh yeah, I'm going out for dinner now. Anything you want, Rin?"

"Fufuu, I thought as much, so I intended to get you alone. I'm someone who will bring a stray dog back after seeing it on a rainy day and feel that it's pitiful!"

Am I a dog?

"Well thanks. Let's go to the cafeteria."

"Okay."

Rin and I walked out. As it's dinner time, a lot of students opened their doors and walked out.

"..."

There are still many girls dressed in homestyle, and I really don't know where to look. Shorts, tank tops, and no bras...what should I say? Please be more mindful of how the opposite gender will look at you--

"Oh, it's Orimura-kun. Hello--"

"Whaaa!? O-Orimura-kun!?"

A scantily dressed girl waved at me happily after she found me. On a side note, her name is...eh, Nohohon-san[2A 5] (for the time being). In the dorm, no matter what the

time is, she'll always be wearing a wide and large nightgown, and at the moment, she will always use the hands hidden in her sleeves to wear it properly. She looks like she's going to tumble any minute, and that has left a deep impression on me.

"Yo, Orimu--"

"You're using this nickname?"

"It's been decided! Also, you're eating together with me and Kanalin~~"

This Nohohon-san (again, temporarily named as such), will always stick to me about 20cm away from me. This image should be similar to that--a mini puppy wanting someone to play with it and then using both feet to approach the guest.

"Unfortunately for you, Ichika's going to have dinner with me."

"Wa--it's Ling Ling. You're so brave~~"

"Do-don't call me that!"

Slightly agitated, Rin's voice sounds somewhat crazy, but Nohohon-san isn't affected at all. Is this what they mean by wasting one's own breath?

Let me add on. When Rin was in elementary school, her name was often a joke among the guys in the class. And since she's a Chinese national, there will be scenarios like 'Ling's' the name of a panda, right? Go eat some bamboo.[2A 6]

Let me add on to that, I ended up fighting against 4 people that day, and of course, I got severely reprimanded.

"Forget about it, Rin. Calm down. It's alright if the 4 of us eat together, right?"

"It's not like I don't mind...but oh well."

Hm? Is this the so-called 'I did not-aru'[2A 7]? Damn it, that's a taboo. Mustn't say it.

"Isn't it strange for Chinese to have an 'aru' behind? Who thought of that!?"

She once went crazy because of it, and once Rin gets angry, she'll be angry for a long time. I experienced that first-hand last month during the class representative battle.

"Speaking of which, where's that girl called Kanalin?"

"Uwa--you're right. She's gone--"

Perhaps since she found the home get-up really embarrassing, she used her arms to cover her body and disappeared into the other end of the corridor.

"Ah--...wait for me~"

And so, that Nohohon-san went off in a certain direction. Uwa! She's so slow.

"..."

"What?"

"Ichika, how is it? You're really popular with the girls aren't you?"

"Huh? How did you derive that conclusion? Everyone's just feeling that it's weird having a guy around."

"Is that so...never mind, it doesn't matter."

Rin's expression doesn't look like it doesn't matter. She just hurriedly moves off to the cafeteria.

Ah, really. Wait for me!

"Hey, did you hear that?"

"I did I did!"

"Huh, what are you talking about?"

"About Orimura-kun."

"Good things? Bad things?"

"The best news!"

"I want to listen!"

"Okay okay, calm down? You can't tell the other girls. Actually during the IS tournament this month--"

As usual, the cafeteria's crammed full of pubescent girls. And Rin and I notice the group of people gathered in a circle at a corner.

"Hm? What's going on over there? There's a lot of people over there."

"Maybe they're playing poker? Or maybe some divination."

But even so, today's a lot more rowdy than usual, and there are even squeals. What's going on?

"WHAAAAT!? IS, IS THAT TRUE!?"

"IT'S TRUE!"

"LIAR--! KYA--WHAT DO WE DO!?"

Did something good happen? I can hear squeals and screams all over the place. Hm, but it's good to be happy. If humans can keep their smiles often, it seems like they

won't age too fast. Anyway, we'll be struggling a lot in society, so it's better to smile when we can now. At least that's how I often feel.

"Ichika."

"Hm."

On a side note, my dinner's herbal fried chicken, fried mountain greens, omelet and a red spinach miso soup. The taste of the dried fish cake is great.

Rin's food is mostly the same as mine, but she chose clam miso soup. She continues to drink the soup as she says to me,

"You're thinking stuff that old blockheads would think of."

How rude.

"No, that's definitely right. Whenever Ichika thinks of that, your eyes will narrow. What's that about. Are you in deep thought?"

"Shu-shut up..."

Why is she staring at me? That's enough.

"Don't point at others with chopsticks. People will think that you've been raised improperly."

"Doesn't matter. It's nothing too great anyway."

"That's not the problem. You have to learn how to change your habits. Speaking of which, it's because of that that you got scolded by Chifuyu-nee."

"Shu-shut up..."

As expected, it seems like Rin's still scared of Chifuyu-nee, as she really looks somewhat in pain.

"--Ichika, you."

"Hn?"

"...Oh well, never mind."

What is it? Rin swallowed those words that she was about to say out, and seems like she wants to sink it deep inside as she gulps down large mouthfuls of rice.

"..."

"..."

Now that the conversation got interrupted, Rin and I silently continue to eat.

Unbelievably, the moment we stopped talking, no matter how much we chewed, we managed to finish our dinner.

"I'll get tea. Is Bancha okay for you?"

"O-okay. Thanks."

Though she's just helping me, I'm rather happy that Rin's concerned about me. However, Rin's looking unhappy for some reason, causing me to stutter in my response.

(Un, did something make her unhappy? No wait, got to find some way to calm the atmosphere down.)

Is there something we can talk about? I start to search through the forest in my brain--oh, let's talk about Gotanda. Rin probably wants to listen about the middle school friend who she hasn't met in a long while.

"Ah--! It's Orimura-kun!"

"What, really? Where?"

"Let me ask you, is that rumor tru--suu"

In the corner at the room, a girl suddenly rushed up at me after noticing me--hm? What's that rumor about? A girl did say that, but she got shut up by the other girls...

"It, it's nothing, nothing at all! Really, there's nothing at all! Ahhahahaha..."

"--Idiot, didn't I tell you that's a secret?"

"But he's the main guy involved..."

Someone's blocking me while the others are muttering behind her."What rumor?"

"Hn, oh? What's that?"

"I-I say, we can talk about rumors 365 days, right!?"

No, that's not right. That's too long. It's already a year.

"Wha, what are you saying, Miyo!? It's only 49 days!"

No, that's wrong as well. Speaking of which--

"What are you hiding?"

"We're."

"Not."

"Hiding anything!"

They immediately retreated after launching a combination attack, and the process took only 2 seconds. Even I can't tell what's going on, and can only stare blankly as they vanish.

"What did you do now?"

Rin came back. She's holding onto two cups of hot tea that are letting out steam, making it look good.

"Why are you treating me like a problematic person!?"

"Don't you find that you're one?"

...

"Ahh, the tea tastes good."

"You're just trying to escape."

You're so rude! On what basis do you say that!?

"Fuu...a good tea after a meal sure is soothing to me, soothing."

"...Ah, never mind, it's nothing."

After chilling out for a while after dinner, I prepared to talk about Gotanda. Rin must have missed him--or rather , I should have called him along.

"Speaking of which--"

I start to talk about what happened today, and Rin was attentive to what I said until we started talking about Ran. She started to show a dark expression.

"...So, she's going to study in IS Academy?"

"I guess."

"Oh..."

For some reason, Rin and Ran don't really get along with each other. Is it because their names are similar?

Assuming that there's someone with the name Ishika appearing in front of me, I'm not confident enough to believe that I can be good friends with him.

"So when she enrolls here, I have to take care of her."

"Oh...HOLD THAT, WHY!?"

Rin slammed onto the table and stood up. Why, why's she angry?

"STOP GOING ABOUT MAKING PROMISES WITH GIRLS SO EASILY!? YOU DEFINITELY CAN'T TAKE RESPONSIBILITY LIKE THAT, ARE YOU AN IDIOT? I SHOULD SAY YOU'RE AN IDIOT! AN IDIOT!"

Woah, she's really angry! Speaking of which, I got scolded by her last month because of another promise.

"No, that, well? Sorry, Rin."

"Instead of apologizing, why don't you just stop making promises so--"

"Ah."

"Ah."

"What are you 'ah-ing' about--ah!"

What's with this scenario? Three people just went 'ah' for no reason...let me add on. I called out first, then Houki, and finally Rin.

"..."

That's right, Houki. Houki's here. Seems like she's here to have dinner. Looking at the time, it seems like she was trying to avoid me...but it seems that I stayed around for too long. Houki looks rather awkward as she looks away from me.

"Erm, hi, Houki."

"We-well, if it isn't Ichika."

"..."

"..."

Damn it, can't continue on.

--Ever since that declaration last month that seemed like there's some emotions, during the time when she moved out, it seemed to be like this between us ever

since then. At first, I would try to look for her and find something to say, but she would often answer 'oh' or 'is that so' and things like that, which makes me really tired.

"What is it? Something happened between you two?"

""No! Nothing!!""

--Damn it, I wanted to deny it and made an immediate response, but we unexpectedly replied in unison.

...In this situation, even I can only think 'it's over, we're dead'. Hold on, will others think about anything else? Hm, maybe I'm really sick.

"Are you deliberately giving me this 'we definitely did something' reaction?"

"How is that possible..."

With Rin glaring at me, I inadvertently try to give an answer that sounds like an excuse. However, it seems like I made Houki unhappy somehow, as she looks away and walks off.

"Ah--..."

Though it's weird to mention it, the way she sways the ponytail makes me unable to explain it[2A 8] Well, I don't really understand what I just said.

"I'm going back to my room then."

"Hm? Oh, thanks for eating together with me."

"...Really, you should at least come invite me once in a while..."

"What?"

"Nothing. Bye bye."

Rin shakes her twin ponytails and walks off in the opposite direction. Let me put on something that can sway, maybe a jacket or something.

(Uu--oh well. Never mind, let's just slowly think through this.)

Walking off to my own room at this point, I never expected what would happen tomorrow.

"As expected, Hazuki Company's still the best."

"Eh? Really? But doesn't Hazuki only focus on design?
"

"That's why it's good."

"In terms of functions, I find Myurei's to be really good , especially the smooth and slick style."

"Ah--that, it's good, but expensive."

On Monday morning, all the girls in the class are chatting away happily. Everyone's holding onto a catalog and comparing the products on them.

"Speaking of which, where's Orimura-kun's IS outfit produced? I've never seen that model before."

"Ah, it's said to be custom-made. As there's no male attire, it seems like they got a certain research lab...let me see, I heard that it was some English company's armed-style."

I can really remember quite a bit. This should be the result of studying hard recently. Not bad, not bad.

On the side note, the IS outfit as what its name stands for. It refers to the unique tight-fitting clothing when an IS is deployed. Even without it, I can still activate my IS, but the response seems to be slower. Eh, what's the reason...

"The IS suit will detect the weak electricity on the skin and pass the signals of the user's movements to all the parts of the body before the IS can take action. Also, this suit is really durable, it can completely withstand a mini-caliber gunshot. Ah, but the impact won't vanish. Please remember it."

Yamada-sensei appeared with a clear explanation.

"Yama-chan's really so knowledgeable!"

"I'm a teacher after all...hold it, Ya-Yama-chan?"

"I really have to look at Yamapi differently!"

"Today's the day when everyone has to request for their attire, so I came earlier, hehe...no wait, Ya, Yamapi?
"

It's been only 2 weeks, and Yamada-sensei already has about 8 nicknames. I guess that's proof of her popularity, and the result of her personality.

"Everyone, it's not really nice to call a sensei like that..."

"Eh, it's alright, it's alright."

"Maa-yan's really a serious person!"

"Maa, Maa-yan? That's..."

"Really? Do you prefer to be called Mayamaya? Mayamaya?"

"That, that's a little..."

"Well, how about we call you Yamaya?"

"Pl-please don't call me that!!"

Yamada-sensei finally says that with emphasis, showing her refusal. What is it? Does she have some bad memories about the Yamaya nickname?"

"An-anyway, everyone must call me 'sensei', got it? Got it?"

Though everyone replied with a 'yes~', that's just a random perfunctory. As for Yamada-sensei's nickname, I suppose there will be a lot more of them in the future.

"Good morning, everyone."

"Good, good morning sensei!"

The classroom that was noisy just now immediately became a neat and orderly squad (of course, that's impossible, this is just an expression), as the homeroom teacher of class 1, Orimura Chifuyu-sensei appears.

--Orimura Chifuyu, my older sister, who was the IS representative of Japan, and is now a teacher in IS Academy. Her treatment toward herself is the same as others, she stands like a soldier and sits like a samurai, and the way she walks is just like an armored tank--would I be killed if I were say that out loud? I would definitely be killed. Inspection's over.

(Ah, she changed into the clothes I prepared for her.)

When I returned home yesterday, I remembered to bring the summer clothes over, and she seemed to have worn it immediately. The attire's black, and it doesn't look that much different from a mini-skirt, but as the material's really light, it feels rather comfortable. Speaking of which, the individual division tournament will be held at the end of this month, and once it's over, it seems like the students can wear summer uniforms.

"From today onwards, we'll be having practical training. As there are training suits, we'll be using ISs, so everyone must pay attention! Don't forget to put on the school regulated attire before you get your own IS suits. Anyone who forgets will have to wear the school swimsuit and truit! And as for that person, well, he can wear a bikini for all I care."

No, there's definitely something wrong with that! Most of the girls other than me must be thinking that way--besides, I'm the only guy, so it would be bad if I wore a bikini, just a bikini.

On a side note, for some reason, the IS designated swimsuits are actually traditional gym outfits, those deep blue kind. People have been saying that it's facing

extinction, but unexpectedly, it managed to survive here. If Gotanda knew of it, he would most likely be elated, but as for me, it's nothing.

(Speaking of which, the gym outfit here for guys are pants.)

Gotanda...I'll omit the rest, please read the front part. Anyway, I'm wearing shorts.

Let me add on. The regulated IS suit has a rather simple design, tight-fitting sleeveless vest and matching shorts. But you may wonder why is it that the school has to specially provide one for everyone when they have their own regulated ones. That's because 100 people can have 100 types of IS. Of course, not everyone can have their own personal suits, so it's really hard to tell how usable their suits are. But at least this is a respect to the girls who love to follow the melancholic girls' hearts? I heard someone tell me that girls are creatures who emphasize on fashion. Let me see, I think Cecilia said that.

On a side note, once one has the right to have a personal IS, the suit will be deployed at the same time as the IS, removing the time needed to change clothes, so

it's really easy. And its noticeable that the worn clothes will be scattered into elementary particles and then kept in the database of the IS, or something like that. To be honest, I don't really remember the explanation regarding this, so it's better not to ask too much.

Anyway, it's just 'POW, flash, and transform', extremely easy to understand.

However, this direct mode that also includes the IS really drains a lot of energy, thus, it's better to deploy an IS normally and put on an IS suit unless it's a critical situation.

"Then, Yamada-sensei, please begin the homeroom."

"O-okay."

After the briefing, Chifuyu-nee hands it over to Yamada-sensei, but Yamada-sensei seems to be rubbing her eyes as she frantically puts her glasses back, looking like a panicking puppy.

"Well, today, I'll be introducing some transfer students, and there are two of them."

"Wha..."

"""WHAAAAAT....!?"""""

On hearing the introduction of transfer students, everyone in the class exploded. Can't be helped, to the class that feeds on gossip even during their meals, it's to be expected that they would be shocked now that a transfer student slipped past their information network, and there are two of them.

(But why our class...? Wouldn't they be separated into different classes?)

While I was thinking about this really seriously, the door opens.

"Excuse me."

"..."

The moment the class saw the two transfer students, the buzzing quietened down.

That's to be expected.

That's because one of them--is a guy.

Chapter 2: My Roommate is... a Blond Gentleman

"I'm Charles Dunois from France. I'm not too familiar with this country, so please take care of me."

One of the transfer students--Charles, smiles and bows to everyone after saying that.

Including me, everyone in the class is stunned.

"A, a guy...?"

Someone muttered.

"Yes. I heard that there's someone in the same situation as me here. So I transferred here from my country--"

He has a face that's easily approachable, courteous, a fine and proper body, bright blond hair on his head--that's neatly tied behind. His body is also so thin that one may feel that it's too skinny, a pair of straight legs, and he sure looks cool.

The image he gives is of 'some royal prince', and that's not an exaggeration. Most notably, that smile which isn't irritating at all is really shiny.

"No..."

"What?"

"NO WAY--!"

Is this the so-called supersonic? Nope, I'm not kidding, a squeal started in the middle of the classroom and spread out just like that.

"A MALE STUDENT! A SECOND MALE STUDENT AT THAT!"

"AND HE'S IN OUR CLASS!"

"AND HE'S HANDSOME! THE TYPE THAT YOU WANT TO PROTECT!"

"I'M SO GRATEFUL TO BE ABLE TO LIVE IN THIS WORLD~!"

Our class girls are really energetic. On a side note, the reason the other classes haven't run out is most likely because it's Homeroom period, right? To all the teaching staff, it's been tough on you.

"THAT'S ENOUGH, SETTLE DOWN AND SHUT UP! "

Chifuyu-nee seems to feel rather irritated as she grumbled. Though it's work, it may seem irritating to hear such girly screams. Besides, she never really got along with ordinary girls when she was still studying.

"Ev-Everyone please be quiet. We haven't ended the self-introduction~!"

Actually, no one actually did forget about the other transfer student--or rather, it's rather difficult to forget about her. That's because she looks like a unique radical.

She has shiny silver hair that's almost white, and the hair's almost reaching her waist. It's pretty, but she didn't tidy it, so it just seems like it's naturally long. Also, she has an eyepatch on her left eye; not a surgical one, but a real black eyepatch like what those colonels in those 20th Century war films would wear. Though the other opened eye is red, hidden in it is a seemingly endless zero degrees Celsius.

The impression she gives with her attire doesn't need much description. She's a 'soldier'. Though her height is obviously shorter than Charles, the chilly presence she gives seems to make her as tall as she is.

Let me add on, Charles is rather short for a guy, so the other transfer student is considered rather short amongst the girls.

"..."

The person involved still hasn't said anything as she maintains her folded arm stance, looking uninterested as she stares at the girls in the class--and that's for just a

moment. Right now, she's staring only at one person... Chifuyu-nee.

"...Hurry up and greet them, Laura."

"Yes, instructor."

Facing the transfer student who's standing straight and answering honestly--Laura, everyone's stunned by her. In contrast, Chifuyu-nee, who got a greeting by a foreigner, reveals a troubled look even though it's different from before.

"Don't call me that here, I'm no longer an instructor. And you're an ordinary student here, so you must call me Orimura-sensei."

"Roger that."

Having answered that, Laura puts her straightened arms to the side and stands straight with her ankles put together--no matter how I look at it, even if she's not related to the military, she did call Chifuyu-nee ' instructor', so she's definitely a German.

--For some reasons, Chifuyu-nee was an Army instructor in Germany for one year, and after a year of

absence, she became an IS Academy instructor, or so I heard.

The reason why I said that is because I'm not too certain myself. I heard that from the other people related to the Academy like Yamada-sensei. She herself didn't tell me anything, probably because a lot of things were involved in that...

(But she should've at least told me what she was doing , right?)

What should I say? Am I feeling unsettled? Nope, this isn't a feeling of loneliness.

"I'm Laura Bodewig."

"..."

The students remain silent, waiting for her to continue, but after she said her name, she shut her mouth up like a clam.

"Is, is that...all?"

"That's all."

Unable to stand this atmosphere, Yamada-sensei tries to force a smile as she asked Laura, but got an unrelenting answer. Hey, Hey, stop bullying the teacher! Look, she's about to cry! Really.

For some reason, maybe because of this, Laura and I exchanged looks.

"So it's you--"

Hm? What? She just closed in without hesitation.

PA!

"..."

"Wh?"

I got hit suddenly, and it was a vicious slap--Wha?

"I won't accept it. You're actually that person's little brother. Who would accept it!?"

While I straightened my thoughts, my face started to ache--what? What's this? Why did you hit me?

See? Everyone's looking over, stunned--no wait, now's not the time to be thinking about this!

"What are you doing?"

"Humph..."

As quickly as she came over, Laura quickly backed away and sits down on the empty seat, folding her hands in front of her chest, shutting her eyes and not giving any reaction at all.

Uwa, I got ignored. I got ignored? What's this? What's this person intending to do? Is she an alien from an uncivilized culture? Is this a show of friendship when people meet for the first time in Germany? I don't want to live in that country at all.

"Ah...ahem! Homeroom lesson will end now. Everyone has to change up, as we'll be doing IS practice together with Class 2. Dismissed!"

Chifuyu-nee clapped her hands to prompt everyone into action. As for me, I'm more angry than unable to accept it, but there's no time to grumble about it now.

The reason is that, if I'm going to stay in the classroom, I will have to change clothes with the girls--once that happens, there will be trouble, big trouble.

So I have to get out of the classroom...huh, I remember the changing room of the 2nd arena's empty today.

"Hey, Orimura. Take care of Dunois. You're both guys, right?"

Oh yeah, almost forgot about him. So it ended up like this.

"Are you Orimura-kun. We've met for the first time, I'm--"

"Ah, save that for later. Let's get out first. The girls are starting to change clothes."

While explaining, I leapt into action. I pulled Charles's hand and walked out of the classroom.

"We'll change in the changing room at the arena, and we have to do that for every practical session in future, so better get used to it."

"O-Okay..."

What's wrong now? He's looking rather anxious, different from just now.

"Do you need to go to the bathroom?"

"It, it's not like that!"

"Really? Then that's good."

Anyway, got to get down the stairs to the first level. We can't slow down. If we do--

"Ahh! Rumored transfer student detected!"

"And he's together with Orimura-kun!"

That's right. Once homeroom period is over, all the students from all classes and all years will send out their elite troops. If we get caught in the flood, we'll be questioned until we're late for lessons. And finally, what awaits us is a hellish special training--I won't allow that to happen, ever.

"Found them! They're here!"

"Everyone who heard them! Hurry up and surround them!"

Hold on, since when has this place become a samurai's house? Now the entire atmosphere feels like someone just used a trumpet shell to blow and alert everyone!

"Orimura-kun's black hair is great, but blond hair's great as well."

"And his eyes are green!"

"Ah! Looky look! They're holding hands!"

"It's great that I can live in Japan! Thank you okaa-san[2B 1]! I promise that for this Mother's Day, I will give you something other than seaside flowers!"

No, you should give a proper gift in other years as well.

"Wha-What's going on? Why is everyone like this?"

It seems that Charles hasn't got what's going on as he asked me, looking really puzzled.

"That's because we're the only two guys here."

"...?"

What's with that 'I don't understand' look?

"No, it should be rather weird, but that's because we're the only two guys in the world who can pilot an IS, right ?"

"Ah--ahh, okay. I see."

"Also...the girls in this school don't seem to interact much with guys, so they became some sort of Uupaaruupaa (Axolotl)!"

"Uu...what's that?"

"Some mysterious monster that was endangered during the 20th century, and was a popular trend in Japan for a while."

"I see."

Oh well, that's not really important anyway. Right now, the most important thing is to break through this line. Before I reach my destination, I shall not die, even if I have to cut a bloody path out!

"But that's great."

"What's great about it?"

"It's really hard to be the only guy in school, so I had to be careful. Even if only one person is added, I feel relieved that it's a guy."

"Is that so?"

Asking me that...isn't he like this? Hm, I really can't understand him.

Or rather, are there IS related schools outside this country? Logically, there shouldn't be any other IS related educational institutes other than this place. Huh, that's weird.

"Oh well. Anyway, nice to meet you! I'm Orimura Ichika, so just call me Ichika!"

"Hm, nice to meet you, Ichika-san. You can just call me Charles."

"Got it, Charles."

Alright! We managed to get out before the crowd got us! Now there's even more reason for us not to stop. Got to run forward.

"Alright! We made it!"

With the ordinary sound of the air lock being removed , the door slides aside, and we managed to reach the second arena's changing room unscathed.

"Oh no! Not much time left! Let's change!"

I look at the time and found the situation to be critical. Speaking of which, this IS suit's really hard to wear!

Anyway, as it's urgent, I said that as I removed all the buttons on my uniform and threw it onto the bench, and then took off my T-shirt as well.

"UWA!"

"?"

Wha-What's going on?

"Did you forget anything...no wait, why aren't you changing? You'll be late if you don't do so! You might not know this Charles, but our homeroom teacher's really strict about being punctual and all--"

"O-Okay, I, I'll change. But, erm, can you please look at the other side...please?"

"Huh, I won't look at you when you change...but Charles, why are you looking at me?"

"I-I'm not! I'm not looking at you!"

Charles raises his hands out to block his face and hurriedly turns to look at the floor. Why is he looking like this? Unbelievable chap.

"But really, let's hurry. It's not good to be late on the first day--or rather, that person won't be laughing."

But then again, I feel that what the burning red-flamed teacher from hell, Orimura Chifuyu-sensei just needs is a heart that's willing to listen to jokes. Even if it's just a lame one, she can just laugh at others and forgive others, saying 'Hahah, you big idiot!'. Can't she become someone like that?...maybe not. That kind of Chifuyu-nee would be rather weird.

"..."

That's strange. I seem to feel a gaze.

"Charles?"

"Wha-What?"

Just as I looked around, seemingly bothered, I found Charles frantically looking at me and turning back to look at the wall while pulling his IS suit up.

"Wow, you're really fast at changing! Is there a trick to it?"

"I-It's nothing. Sort of normal, I guess...you still haven't finished changing yet, Ichika-san?"

I already took over my pants and underwear, and my IS suit's already at the waist. What can I say? It's a pathetic state now.

"This clothing's really hard to wear, I have to strip myself just to wear it, and I'll get tangled easily."

"Ta-Tangled?"

"Yeah."

I don't know whether it's just me, but Charles blushes. Such a strange fellow.

"Heyo--okay, let's go."

"O-Okay."

Once both of us were suited up, we left the changing room. While heading to the arena, I turned to look at Charles again.

"The suit you're wearing really looks good. Where's it made in?"

"Ah, um, this is a suit created by Dunois Enterprise! Though it was developed through the basic Greek design , it seems to be a thoroughly customized version."

"Dunois? I seem to have heard of that before..."

"Yup, that's my family. My dad's the President, I guess it should be the largest IS related enterprise in France."

"Ohh! So Charles is the son of the President. No wonder."

"Hm? No wonder what?"

"Yup. Well, how should I put it? You have an aura like you're grew up in some great environment. Now I understand."

"Great environment...huh?"

Charles suddenly looked away. Did I say something I shouldn't have said? He's showing a complicated look right now.

"Well, compared to me, Ichika-san's even more impressive, right? That you're Orimura Chifuyu-san's little brother."

"Hahaha, you idiot."

"Wha?"

"--It's nothing. It seemed like we stepped onto landmines and blew up a fighter jet on each side."

"??? I don't really understand..."

There are some situations in the world that are hard to understand. Situations, circumstances, toppo[2B 2]--

"No no no, this thought process is bad. It's weird in all aspects."

"?"

Huh, he's looking at me strangely...I already took caution not to be stared at. To think that I made a fool of myself! Ten thousand deaths aren't enough for me! I'm dead!

"...Ahem, Charles-kun, let me ask you a physics question."

"Why must you suddenly add a -kun suffix?"

"That's not important. How do you calculate the resistance force when a high speed object moves under force A?"

"Huh, the resistant force is -A."

"That's the case."

Nice going. That's an intelligent question. Now my ' intelligence value' should be rated at 50, right? I'm certain of it.

"..."

Wha? That's strange. He's silent now, what? 'The Silent Frigade'[2B 3]? But maybe Charles like the lamb[2B 4], right? But the lamb's not in the 'Silent' series?

"Wh...ahhahaha! What was that? Fu, fufufu, you're weird, Ichika!"

I got laughed at. To think that I made a fool of myself here...I'll omit the rest. Read what happened above!

"Since I'm going to be laughed at either way, I actually would prefer it if you used 'Haha, you idiot!' again..."

"Well--that's not it! I was praising Ichika's talent in joking."

Huh? Is that so? Well, that's that."

"YOU'RE TOO SLOW!"

We just got to the second arena successfully. Ahh, the devil's folding her arms and waiting for me...'Do you need a mace'? Oh yeah, though it's not important, if I write it as canabow, it feels like some brand, canabow!

"Since you have time to think about such useless things, hurry up and get in line!"

Passu-n! Thanks for your sermon.

Charles and I got to the side of class 1.

"You really took your time."

Oh, what coincidence. Cecilia's standing beside me. Ever since the representative battle in April, she would say some stuff to me--I'm sorry, but my sister already took up that space.

"Why did you need so much time just to change clothes?"

On a side note, as IS suits were designed for females, it looks like some kind of swimwear or tight-fitting clothing. As for why some skin would be revealed, it seems like they considered the need for mobility. Well, there are the IS shields, so the area covered by the IS suit doesn't really matter much.

But Charles and I are different. We're covered entirely up to the neck. That's because only the neck, hands and legs are exposed, so it feels like a diving suit. I remember they said that some data is required or something.

Well, that makes sense, I guess. If we were to wear something that's like swimsuits, the guys would have to go naked on top. The school must have considered this right? I guess.

"We got caught in a jam."

"Stop lying, you could have made it."

Wha? Why is Cecilia sounding so vexed? Is she fulfilling the saying that a pretty rose has it's thorns? I seem to have said it before, but at that time, Rin angrily scolded me, saying 'Wow, don't you even feel embarrassed at all?'

"I got it, I got it. Ichika-san's really popular with girls, right? Or else you wouldn't have gotten hit twice within 2 months."

Wah! I got mocked! She reminded me of the fact that I got hit by the transfer student, and now my face is swelling in pain again.

"What? What did you do?"

I could only hear the voice--damn it, is that a highly-skilled ninja? Where are the guards!?

"I'm behind, you idiot!"

Ohh, yes yes yes, class 2's behind us. So it's Rin. Wait, hold on, is Rin the only class 2 girl who'll call me that? Like idiot, big idiot, moron, or something like that?

"This Ichika-san just got slapped in the face by a transfer student today."

"What? Ichika, why are you so dumb?"

--Relax, I have two more in front of me.

Kekekeke...Cecilia and Rin turn their necks with creaking sounds.

And waiting for them in front is the administrator of the hellish practical lesson, the instructor from hell. Accepting anyone, not caring about the age, nationality, gender, the gates of hell have opened.

PA--!

Under the azure sky, the smack of the attendance book is still loud and clear today.

"First, we'll be watching a practical battle that involves close range and shooting."

"Yes ma'am!"

As it's a combined practical between class 1 and class 2 , there's double the number of people as per usual, and even the replies sound a lot louder.

"Kuu...how could you just hit my head like that..."

"...It's all Ichika's fault. It's all Ichika's fault. It's all Ichika's fault..."

Teary-eyed, Cecilia and Rin stroke their heads, maybe because it's painful.

Speaking of which, don't you feel that it's wrong? It's alright if it's just me thinking too much, but if that's the case, I want my lawyer!

DONK!

"I can tell what you're thinking..."

Wah! She kicked me! I got kicked in the back by a girl! Sensei! Sense-I~!

"Today, I would like to let everyone see a real battle, and there just so happen to be lively girls here present--Huang! Alcott!"

"Wh-Why me too?"

Ohh, so you got dragged in. Give up, Cecilia, most common sense doesn't work on Chifuyu-nee. But while we back away, she will make up some random sense[2B 5] to deal with us, and that's even more irritating. But then again, she mostly uses physical attacks.

"Since you two have personal suits, you can start battle immediately. Okay, get out here."

"Why me..."

"It's definitely Ichika's fault, so why..."

Ahh, I heard nothing, I heard nothing.

"You two better buck up--and show that guy what you two are made of!"

Hm? What's wrong? Seems Chifuyu-nee whispered something to them. What did she say?

"This is the stage for me, the representative candidate for England, Cecilia Alcott!"

"That's right. It's a great chance to show everyone the difference in ability as a personal IS pilot!"

For some reason, both their motivation values just shot up. What? They can get a free meal if they win? Ah, as they're girls, it's likely it's for desserts.

"Then who's my opponent? I'm alright even if it's against Rin-san."

"Fufu, that's my line. I'll slaughter you."

"No need to rush, idiots. Your opponent will be--"

Kiiiiinnn...

Hm? What's that sound? Sounds like air being split. Don't tell me--

"AHHH--! PL-PLEASE GET OUT OF THE WAY~!"

Huh? What, she's referring to me? --Ack, WAA!!"

DONK!

Just as I wanted to turn to look at the source of the voice, it's too late. After being hit by one UFO, I got sent flying several meters away and tumble onto the floor.

"Ho...good thing I barely managed to deploy [Byakushiki], but what was that--"

Something soft.

"What?"

What's with this feeling in my hand? Is the ground that soft? Did they patch up some pudding or something ? Ah, so that's what they mean by purine, right? (TL Note : Both pudding and purine are written in the same manner:プ, purin)

"That, that, Orimura-kun...kya!"

The pudding talked--wait, hold on, how's that possible ?

Fearful, I looked down at my hand.

"Th-That, you see, in this situation, I'm really troubled.. .no, this isn't the only problem. No matter what, I still have a teacher-student relationship with Orimura-kun... but if it continues like this, Orimura-sensei will be my sister-in-law, and that's very tempting somehow--"

Yamada-sensei. It's Yamada-sensei! The pudding's Yamada-sensei! The pudding's not just a pudding, it's an elastic one--why am I like a dirty old man now...

She normally doesn't wear tight-fitting clothes, so I couldn't tell; but the IS suit she's wearing now is the the kind that's extremely voluptuous. Her hefty beautiful breast curves are exposed in front of everyone.

Hu, those breasts are huge...bigger than Chifuyu-nee's...

However, the problem is our positioning--I got knocked away, and she and I tumbled together, so right now, I'm pressing down on Yamada-sensei, and my hand's holding tightly onto Yamada-sensei's breast, grabbing it.

No, I understand that it's bad if I don't let go. But even so, I can't let go for some reason...no, I'm serious, serious! I know I have to let go soon, but my body's mysteriously frozen. Is this what they mean by being crushed by ghosts--

"--!?"

After my instincts detected danger, I got out of my frozen state and leapt away from Yamada-sensei. At that moment, the lasers shot past where I was just a second ago.

"Hohohohoho...what a pity, I missed."

She's smiling, but I can see veins on her forehead--she's the firmament of the sky, Cecilia Alcott (Large dragon buster mode). Wa...

"..."

I seem to hear the sound of something combining together. Wha? It's that thing right? That's Rin's 'Souten Gagetsu', right? The blades are separated at the beginning, and they can be combined to a create a double-bladed form. And in that situation, it's possible that she may throw it. That's right, that's right, she may throw it--

"WAAAAHHHH!!!"

SHE JUST THREW IT AT MY HEAD WITHOUT HESITATION!

At the last moment, I bent backwards to dodge the attack, but my momentum carried me further back. Then, I saw the sight of despair.

The 'Souten Gagetsu' that was thrown out spins back as its shaped like a boomerang.

"HAA!"

PAM! *PAM!*

As the two shots ring, the bullets accurately hit the two sides of the 'Souten Gagetsu' and change its trajectory.

While hearing the bullet shells drop, I turned around to look, and found that the sniper who saved me from such a crisis was actually Yamada-sensei.

Anchored sturdily in her hands is a 51 caliber assault rifle 'red bullet', the firearm and its ammunition made by an American company called Claus. As it's practical and extremely reliable, it became a main essential model that many countries have come to use.

However, what was most surprising was Yamada-sensei's image--she was still lying on the floor in a prone position, only lifting her body slightly to shoot. She looked extremely cool and poised, unlike the normally clumsy demeanor she shows.

Though it's not to the extent that it seemed like she switched personalities, I really can't imagine her being the one who crashed into the wall and couldn't move during the entrance exam.

"..."

It seems like I'm not the only one who's shocked--forget about Cecilia and Rin, even the other girls are speechless.

"Though Yamada-sensei doesn't look like it, she was a former representative candidate, so shooting like what she just did isn't much."

"Well, that was ages ago. And I never got past being a representative candidate..."

It's back to the normal Yamada-sensei presence. She turned around, stood up, placed her rifle into the weapon box on her shoulder, and then used both hands to adjust her glasses...ah, looking at the actions, this is the Yamada-sensei we know alright. It seems like she's shy about what she heard Chifuyu-nee say as she blushed.

"So then, little girls, let's start already."

"Wha? Erm, 2 vs 1 is..."

"No, this is too..."

"Relax, if it's you two, you'll definitely lose."

Maybe they felt unhappy after hearing that they would lose, as Cecilia and Rin's wills start to burn, especially Cecilia, since it's important for her to beat her opponent at least once, so her killing intent and power have risen.

"Then, let's start!"

Cecilia and Rin shouted out as they flew. Seeing this, Yamada-sensei flies up as well.

"I won't hold back!"

"I wasn't serious back then anyways!"

"H-Here I come!"

Yamada-sensei's talking as per normal, but her eyes are now as cool and sharp as they were before. Cecilia and Rin launched a preemptive attack, but Yamada-sensei easily dodged them.

"Then, during this time...Dunois, give a commentary on the IS Yamada-sensei's using."

"O-Okay."

Charles continued to watch the battle in the sky as he explained with a reliable voice,

"The IS Yamada-sensei's using is a [Raphael Revive] from Dunois Enterprise. It's a machine developed at the end of the 2nd generation phase, but the specifications rival that of the early 3rd generation machines. In terms of deployed mass production IS models, it was the last to be sold, but has the 3rd largest user-base in the world. Only 7 countries are permitted to create it, and 12 countries use it as a standard IS. Most notably, because of the controls it can allow pilots to fit what they want. By changing the equipment, it can be configured for all types of combat, including close ranged combat, sniping and defending types, so there are many partnering companies working on it."

"Mm, that's enough for now...it's ending!"

Engrossed in Charles's explanation, I forgot to look at how the battle is right now.

I turned back to look at the battle, and found that Yamada-sensei's shots were luring Cecilia and Rin to collide together. Yamada-sensei then threw a grenade at them, and once the explosion occurred, two figures crashed onto the ground in a puff of smoke just like that.

"Ku, uu...to think that I actually..."

"Ah, you...she predicted so much of your evasive maneuvers, it's so silly..."

"Is-Isn't it the same for you, Rin-san? We failed because you made too many meaningless mixed tactics and Impact Cannon attacks!"

"That's my line! Why did you release your BITs immediately? The power was depleted so fast!"

"Ggggrrr....!"

"Kkkkkkk...!"

Seems like this is a Battle Royale--anyway, it doesn't look like they have a good relationship anyway.

What should I say? Both of them have their own ideas that are pretty random. Anyway, I just can't watch this

further. I can hear the 'representative candidates with their personal suits' stock drop drastically. However, the most heartless thing seems to be that there's doesn't seem to be a limit in the drop.

In the end, both of them continued to glare at each other until the girls of class one and class two started to chuckle.

"Okay now, everyone should understand the ability of the teachers now. From now onwards, please show some respect to the staff members."

Chifuyu-nee clapped twice to divert everyone's attention.

"The ones with personal frames are Orimura, Alcott, Dunois, Bodewig, and Rin. Then, we'll be dividing the class into groups of 8. Personal machine users will act as leaders, got that? Split up now."

The instant Chifuyu-nee finished, the 2 classes of girls rush over to Charles and me.

"Orimura-kun, let's work hard together!"

"Teach me what I don't know~"

"Dunois-kun, please show me your piloting skills."

"Hey, hey, can I join in too? Let me join you too!"

...What can I say? The reaction's a lot stronger than what I expected, and Charles and I don't know how to respond as we could only stand about.

Either because she couldn't stand this situation or ' cause she's angry that she didn't foresee this, Chifuyu-nee pressed onto her forehead with her fingers, feeling really bothered as she bellows,

"These idiots...EVERYONE SORT OUT ACCORDING TO SEATING ARRANGEMENTS! GROUP LEADER ORDER WILL BE AS DESCRIBED. IF YOU DON'T GET SORTED INTO GROUPS FAST, YOU PEOPLE WILL CARRY IS MACHINES AND RUN AROUND THE FIELD 100 TIMES!"

Is that an Authoritarian's roar? The girls who were surrounding us like ants all moved quickly and managed to get into their groups within 2 minutes.

"I should have done this from the beginning. Really, they're a bunch of idiots."

"...That's great. I'm in the same group as Orimura-kun! I'm really grateful for my own surname..."

"...Sigh--, it's Cecilia...she just lost so badly..."

"...I'll be in your care, Rin-san. Please tell me more about Orimura-kun..."

"...Dunois-kun! You can ask me about anything you don't know! Also, I'm still single!..."

"..."

On a side note, the group that isn't saying anything is the group of that German transfer student Laura Bodewig.

The tense atmosphere, the presence that refuses to work with others, the cold stare-down on the other students, and the mouth that never spoke since the beginning.

Facing such an iron wall, even those pure-hearted 10+ girls wouldn't even dare to talk to her. Everyone's just lowering their heads and forced to remain silent...ahh, I really feel sorry for them...

"Then, please listen up. Each group is to take one training suit. There are 3 Uchigane and 2 Revives, so each group, please decide on the type of frame you like the most. Ah, it's first comes first served--"

Yamada-sensei's even more reliable by 3 times--no, 5 times now. The mock battle just now got her confidence back, right? As her attitude's really proper, so just removing her glasses alone seem to make her a 'really capable woman'.

However, what's proper isn't just her attitude. The breasts that girls who are in their teens don't have are now exposed. Yamada-sensei has a habit of adjusting her glasses, and every time she does this, the breasts that seem to be called out will touch her elbows--and the heavy sweet fruits will jingle.

"..."

CRACK!

"OW! WHA...WHAT WAS THAT?"

My foot got stamped on, and at the back of my ankles. It's one thing to be attacked on the back like that, it's another to be attacked at a perfect angle, causing me to cry out in pain.

Who, who did that? The only one who would do something like this is...

"What are you staring intently at? Hurry up and start!"

"Yes, Houki..."

"What?"

Wah. She's really angry now. This isn't good.

--Speaking of which, we're in the same group? If that's the case, I have to use this chance to repair our relationship. Due to many reasons, we haven't spoken to each other properly for a week. If this keeps up, I feel that we can't even call each other by our names.

(Okay, time to show my friendliness--)

"Orimura-kun, teach me how to pilot an IS!"

"Aa--n, this IS is really heavy. I never lifted anything heavier than chopsticks."

"I remember that the practical lessons require 2 people in a group. Orimura-kun, let's go."

"Hey, hey, it's great to have a personal IS, right? I'm so envious of you people--"

Just when I wanted to talk to Houki, the girls in my group took the opportunity to surround me, and besides, since I'm the group leader, I can't just say okay to everyone. Things have gotten a lot complicated.

"W-Well, everyone, please listen to m..."

"Every leader is to assist each group member in putting on the suit. As everyone needs to use it, we removed the optimizing and personalizing modes. Anyway, before lunch today, everyone please practice on the initializing."

On the IS broadcast channel, Yamada-sensei's voice can be heard. As it's already past the lesson phase, right now, I still have some aspects that I don't understand. And besides, I'm the group leader. It'll be bad if I mess up.

"So then, please queue up in order of your student number. Practice your walking. The first one--"

"Register no. 1! Aikawa Kiyoka of the Handball club! My hobbies are watching sports and jogging!"

"O-Okay, but you didn't need to do a self-introduction. .."

"Nice to meet you!"

She bowed deeply and extends her right hand out. Hm ? What? Does she want to shake hands with me?

"Aa, that's too sneaky!"

"I wanna do that as well!"

"Please make a choice based on your first impression!"

For some reason, all the other girls are lined up and bow politely like her, extending out their right hands.

"Wh-What's going on? I don't really understand--"

""""Please take care of us!""""

...At this moment, another few voices can be heard from behind.

Turning around to look, I see a row of people bowing in front of Charles, each waiting to shake hands with him . He sure looks troubled.

"Er, erm...?"

I can see him all confused here. That's a coincidence, I am too.

""""OW OW OW!!!""""

It's a chorus of perfectly timed cries. I guess it's easy to knock them on the heads as they're lined up, right? As Charles's girls are rubbing their heads and looking up, they all seem to realize who's the Asura in front of them.

"It's great that you people have that much enthusiasm. If that's the case, let me see your performance. Who's first ?"

"Ah, no, that's..."

"We, we'll just have Dunois-kun teaching us~...that's all."

"How, how can we let sensei trouble herself..."

"Is there a problem? There's no need to be so polite. To all you prospects, I must give you a certain level of training...ahh, let's start by seating arrangement."

I seem to hear a gasp. Let me put my hands together, if you survive, we may meet one day.

Seeing the terrible state that befallen Charles's group of girls, the fear struck Orimura's group, and they naturally fell in line. Right now, Aikawa-san's opening the exterior of the IS controls to confirm the values. Let me add on, our group's training suit is [Uchigane].

"Oh well, let's begin. Aikawa-san, you should have taken an IS a few times, right?"

"Ah, yes, but only during lessons."

"Then there should be no problems. Anyway, please suit up and try to activate it. If we exceed the time, we have to stay behind after school."

"The-then that would be bad! Okay, I'll do this seriously!"

Though it does sound like she wasn't serious up till now, in this situation, I'll just close one eye. We hate sin, not humans, and our past mistakes aren't related to our future...huh, who said that?

Anyway, there's no problem with the suit up, initializing and walking, and the practice went by smoothly.

--Logically, that should be the case, but when the second person suited up, there was a small problem.

"I'm sorry, but, I can't reach the cockpit..."

"Ah! Aa~..."

Damn it, it's over. I forgot everything since I had my own personal machine--while using a training suit, we have to kneel down to get out. If we stand up to remove it, the IS will naturally be in a standing position.

"What's wrong?"

Ohh, Yamada-sensei appears! As she removed her IS already, she's wearing the busty IS suit--so naturally, I can only look away awkwardly.

"The, that, I forgot the instruct to leave the IS bent down..."

"Ah--so you mean that the cockpit is at a high position, right? If that's the case, it can't be helped; Orimura-kun, please escort her up there."

"...Huh?"

"Wh-What?"

"Huuh~ How lucky-!"

Let me add on, in order, the people who spoke that were me, Houki and the 2nd person (sorry, I forgot the name).

"Because that's the easiest way. Orimura-kun, please summon [Byakushiki]."

"Oh, okay..."

Like how she instructed, I deployed [Byakushiki] and suited up. The more-than-one month's training wasn't for show, as I could immediately summon it now.

"Then, please carry Kishisato-san up."

"Huh? No, that--"

"Wh-Why?"

Ohh! Houki jumped in! Nice going! Do your best! I don't know her personal reasons, but I'm a healthy male after all, so obviously I would try to avoid contact with girls. Besides, there would be trouble if something happens.

"Since the IS can fly, if he just needs to send her into the cockpit, this would be the most suitable method."

"There's no need to do that. Just let him be a stepping board!"

That's right, that's right--huh? A stepping board?

"A stepping board? Huh, may I ask who you want to act as one?"

"Of course it's Ichika!"

What's with that 'of course'?

"Hold, hold on a minute. If I have to become a stepping board, I rather send her up. That's safer."

"Yeah, it's a lot safer."

"Che--whatever!"

Ahh-...I seem to have made her angry. Houki just turned her back at me and walked away.

"Then Orimura-kun, please carry me up over there!"

Though I'm unwilling, it can't be helped. Since it's just this one time, I guess it's alright.

"Oh yes, Orimura-kun? You weren't looking at sensei just now. This won't do! We don't have to look at each other in the eyes all the time, but once you enter society, such a response can be seen as rude, so please take note of that."

"Ah, that's..."

"You see? You're doing it again! You must look at me straight on."

Maybe the battle just now increased her confidence, as Yamada-sensei grabbed my shoulder with an unimaginable force and turned me over.

And because she used both hands to pull me, the huge breasts that are stuck between the shoulders are even more ample.

"Ya-Yamada-sensei, please listen to me..."

Damn it, I can even tell that my body's heating up.

However, all my hopes in her to understand a boy's innocent feelings were crushed, as it seems like not even a third of those feelings were passed while Yamada-sensei pulled me even forcefully.

"Look over here, Orimura-kun!"

As she used force, the ample breasts that were crampled between her shoulders started to shake. To be honest, for this 15 year old healthy boy, it was really mesmerizing--or rather, I should say, one poisonous scene.

"Sensei, Orimura-kun doesn't know what to do~"

"Ya ya, that's a low blow, emphasizing on the breasts like that."

"Br-Breasts...!?"

At this moment, finally figuring out where the problem lies at last, Yamada-sensei stares at her own breasts, and then at my face.

"~~!?"

Yamada-sensei seems to back away from me quickly as she frantically covers her own body.

"Wha, that..."

I really want to change this invincibly awkward atmosphere, but I don't really know what to say--'your breasts are superb'...I'm an idiot. I'd get sued for sexual harassment.

"O-Orimura-kun."

With her back facing me, Yamada-sensei turned her face over at me. She sounds really shy as her face is blushing red.

"Th-That...you saw that?"

"Huh, about that...yes."

Even though I told myself not to look, not to look, not to look, I still more or less saw it. As lies will raise a few eyebrows, I honestly admitted it. However, on hearing my answer, Yamada-sensei's ears went red as well.

"Th-That, even though age and gender can't be helped, this isn't good. Besides, we have many problems in regards to age differences and standpoints...personally, I'm happy that I can make you aware of this, but it's still--"

"Yamada-sensei...would you mind telling me what you're doing..."

Chifuyu-nee has a hand supporting her head as she said that. Does she have a headache? That's tough on her.

"O-Orimura-sensei!? No, I-I'm, this...!"

"Sigh...I'll listen to your explanation. Right now, the main point is that Bodewig's group is extremely slow, so please go over to help them."

"O-Okay!"

Yamada-sensei stood up and ran towards Laura's group. On the way there, she glances back, just so happens to meet me in the eyes, and start to blush again.

"What..."

"Hurry up and practice, you idiot. The next slowest group will be yours, Orimura."

Ahh, I got scolded by the instructor from hell. Is that my fault...I guess so.

"Then let's hurry up!"

"Hiyaaa!!?"

Anyway, I followed the instructions and carried Kishisato-san up. However, she let out a strange sound--hold on, hold on, I didn't touch her in anyplace weird.

"O-Orimura-kun's really forceful..."

No, that's because we have so little time left. Speaking of which, girls are really light! Why's that so? That was easy. It wasn't easy the last time I carried up the fainted Gotanda. He was so heavy that I almost thought of

dumping him on the road. But of course, I did send him to the infirmary properly--oh well, that's not important.

"Hold on tight or you'll drop."

"O-Okay..."

After confirming that Kishisato-san's grabbing onto my shoulder with slightly trembling hands, I slowly raised her up. However, the height's about only 1m, so it's not that dangerous.

However, the IS training frames are basically maintained in deployed form. Thus, one has to lean back on top to seat in. Thus, it's still dangerous even if it's not too high.

I take care not to drop Kishisato-san as I carry her to the Uchigane's cockpit.

"Then, move your back in and raise your body up. Also, it's better to put your hand on the armor there. Do you understand?"

"I, I'm okay."

As I haven't let go of her yet, our conversation was held in a rather tight position. She's still mindful about being touched by guys, huh? Kishisato-san's eyes are wavering about uncomfortably.

"I'm letting go now. Is this okay?"

"Huh? Th-This..."

"Is there a problem?"

"It's more like I'm in dreamland..."

"?"

While we're talking, the other groups are starting to talk.

"AHHH! WH-WHAT'S THAT!?"

"THAT'S TOO SLY! I WANT TO BE HUGGED!"

"WHY! WHY'S MY REGISTER NUMBER 12? I HATE THE ANCESTOR WHO GAVE ME THIS FAMILY NAME, UNTIL THE END OF TIME!"

No, ancestors should be respected, right? Besides, the end of time would mean your children and grandchildren, so please don't involve them in some strange grudge.

"An-Anyway, I'm okay. Hurry back, Orimura-kun. If this keeps up, I don't know what will happen to me later. .."

"Mn, I got it."

I don't know what's going on, but she has some hidden feelings, right? Should be that legend only girls know of. Though I don't know what it is, it's more or less that.

"Try activating it then."

With me prompting, the initiation starts. The opened armor locked up and secured the pilot inside. Then, with a silent initializing sound, the [Uchigane] stood upright.

"Then next--"

(Argh, this is infuriating me!)

Houki folded her arms and shut her eyes as she pretended to look calm. However, her heart was very unstable, and what happened just now was still on her mind.

(And what was that? Was there a need to be so close? Ichika could have just acted as a stepping board. Yes, a stepping board!)

That being said, in actuality, even if that other girl tramples down on Ichika, that wouldn't interest her.

That's because Houki herself is still ambiguous about her own feelings, so even if others are to ask her 'what do you want to do then', she isn't clear about what she wants. That's how the human heart is.

(And he was staring at Yamada-sensei...aahh, such a useless bum!)

To be honest, thanks to kendo training, Houki's still rather confident of her own figure.

Even though she feels burdened by her own breasts, it's good that they can become part of her charm. However--

(He didn't notice it when he was with me...!)

Until when they stopped living together with each other, Ichika's attitude hasn't really changed much, which made her really unhappy.

...However, it's not that Ichika didn't notice it. He just felt that if he showed that he was really troubled by it, Houki would be bothered, so he acted as if he didn't care. .. Of course, it's not that he would be bothered by everything.

It's also a characteristic of human nature to not be so straightforward.

"Alright, remove the suit now."

While Houki was pondering, the practical training seemed like it was a success, and the second girl finished activating the IS and walking.

"Ah, please remember to bend down and remove it, or else--"

Before Ichika managed to finish, the second girl seem like she just thought of something as she removed the IS while it was still in a standing position.

With that, the cockpit's stuck on top like how it was just now.

"Ahh! Wh, what were you doing!?"

"It's not that, the other girls are staring at me so strongly..."

"Wh-What?"

"Ahem...that's my personal problem."

Adding on, she was obviously referring to the other girls in her group when she said that, as everyone's giving her a 'do you think that you can just earn that benefit like that' look. Wow, that's really scary.

All the other girls in other groups are opening their mouths in envy, looking like chicks waiting for a mother to feed them.

However, what awaited them wasn't a reward, but a stern treatment by the instructor from hell.

"Oh, so you still have time to look at other places, right ? To reward you of your boredom, I'll let you run 20 laps around the field. How is it? Are you satisfied?"

"Tha-Thank you sensei..."

The instructor from hell can also cry. No wait, those should be the reflection of other people's tears in the devil's eyes.

"Ahh--...so I have to send someone up again? Huh, who's next?"

Ichika looks really bothered as he scratched his head and looks around.

--Ahem, after clearing her throat to ready her feelings, Houki tries to act calm as she says,

"Me."

"O-Okay."

Seeing Ichika's shocked look, Houki wants to back away, but she knows that she has even more reason not to panic. Maybe it's due to the pride of practising kendo, as Houki's expression remains unchanged while she steps forward.

"Huh--, so."

"What? Hurry up and get me up! I don't really want this, but considering the safety reasons, this can't be helped."

Though Houki wants to emphasize that it can't be helped, Ichika still considered her feelings and thought that it's because of another thing altogether.

"Then, I'll be a stepping board--"

"Didn't I say that this can't be helped due to safety reasons?"

"--I'll send you over, I'll send you over."

Aah, really, what in the world. Though Ichika muttered so, Houki's not listening.

Because no matter what, he's going to carry her. And seeing how he carried the girl just now--

(Is-Isn't that the legendary 'princess carry'...!? But, what should I say...great...no! Logically speaking, boys and girls shouldn't be sticking that close together!... But forget about it, considering the safety reasons, this can't be helped...that's right, this can't be helped!)

"Ah, ahem!"

"What's wrong, Houki? Got a cold?"

"No, nothing."

Anyway, Houki, who was so happy that she wanted to laugh out is trying her best to hold her emotions back. Perhaps it's due to that strong emotion of holding back that strong emotion that her face's looking twice as serious as usual.

"I'm carrying you up then!"

Ichika wraps his arm around her waist, and it looks like it's happening in slow motion. As his hand reaches over, Houki's heart starts to beat faster, and her body temperature begins to increase.

"Heyo!"

"Kya--ahem ahem!"

She nearly shouted out, but she coughed even forcefully twice to hide this.

(I-Id-Idiot! Who in the world carries someone so suddenly like that!? Is, is he trying to scare me...speaking of which, it feels like he's so well-trained...)

Being mindful, she looks up at Ichika's face, and at that moment, Ichika seem to notice it as he looks around.

"What's wrong?"

"No-Nothing! Nothing at all!"

As their faces are even closer than what she thought, Houki frantically looks away.

What she was mindful about just now has been all forgotten. Right now, she's more bothered by Ichika.

The body warmth of those strong arm muscles, and the breathing and heartbeat of hers that she worries about showing to him if they get too close--those are feelings of expectations and anxiety.

"Houki."

"Wh-What?"

"Nothing. I'm telling you to hold tight, or you'll fall off!
"

"O-Okay...that, that's right. It's over if I drop. I have no choice but to grab onto Ichika."

After repeating another 'have no choice', Houki timidly reaches out and slings her arms around Ichika. As the IS suit is a skintight design, once her fingers touch Ichika's skin, Houki's heart start to pound faster.

(It, it's like I just touched him directly--KYA! WHAT AM I THINKING!?)

Ichika stares at Houki with an incredulous look while she continues to shake her head violently, bringing her up near to the [Uchigane]'s cockpit.

"Houki."

"Wh-What?"

"Well, if you don't sit in onto the IS, we can't continue with the practical class. Do you mind if I bring you closer in?"

"No, no! If you bring me closer in, even I can't remain calm--"

"? What did you say?"

"No-Nothing! An-Anyway, I'm okay!"

Like what Houki said, she pushes her hand away from Ichika and quickly sits inside the Uchigane.

"Doesn't look like there's anything wrong. Then after you finish the activation and walking, please hand over to--"

"Ichika."

"Hm? What is it?"

"We-Well you see, do you have plans for lunch today?"

Though she's acting calm, her voice's obviously a bit louder than usual.

"No, not that I know of."

"Oh, really?"

Seemingly looking like she just randomly asked, Houki's expression immediately lit up, but only for a few seconds as she reverts back to her cool expression.

"If, if that's the case, how about we have lunch together once in a while! Hm, just like that."

"Hm? Ohh, I guess it's sounds nice."

Houki continues to say as she activates the [Uchigane] before making it walk. This process isn't draggy, and it feels like some kendo movement.

However, while Houki looks like a samurai who's trained before, she's actually overwhelmed with joy. She hid her feelings though, so of course Ichika doesn't know.

"There's no problem! As expected of Houki! Okay then , please bend over and come down--"

"..."

"HEY! WHY IS THE **IS** STANDING AGAIN!? ARRGHH! I'M GOING CRAZY!"

Before hearing Ichika's words, Houki quickly landed. Of course, she knew she has to let the IS bend down, but

she still can't refuse the silent demand of the girls in her group.

However, a more accurate reason would be because she's feeling so happy that 'it doesn't matter even if she gives the other girls a little welfare'.

(Ev-Ever since that day, I never had a chance to talk to Ichika properly. I have to do whatever it takes to get it back!)

To be honest, she does have a secret plan.

Anyway, having gained an advantage over the other girls (or so she thought), Houki's mood is as great as ever .

"Then, that's it for morning practice. As we have to inspect the machines that're used in the morning, all groups please gather at the hangar. All people with personal machines please watch out for the training machines and their own. Then, class dismissed."

Our combined group of class 1 and 2 barely managed to complete the activation test. After everyone managed to hurriedly move the IS to the hangar, they returned back to the field. As time was really short, everyone's moving about crazily. At this moment, if we're late, I don't know what the instructor from hell will say.

And after we huffed and puffed till we finished all of that, Chifuyu-nee and Yamada-sensei quickly left the scene.

"Ah--...never expected it to be so heavy..."

Though the training machines were delivered by IS escort vehicles, there's nothing to move this. In other words, 'humans' are the moving forces, and in this group , obviously, I'm the main person pushing. All the girls think that manual work has to be done by guys, and even if there're some people who don't think that way, right now, the men have almost no right to say that. It's that kind of a culture now.

(But if I, a guy, don't push it and call the girls to do it, wouldn't it be too shameful instead of weird. I'll do it anyway.)

On a side note, Charles's group is having a situation when 'how can we let Dunois-kun do this!' as they have several sports-group girls transport it.--huh? Hold on? Why's the attitude different from my group...

"Sigh, forget about it Charles. Go change now! We still need to get to the changing room at the arena."

"Huh, erm...I'll go after I adjust the suit, so you go first. I may need to take some time, so it's okay not to wait for me."

"Hm? No, I'm okay with waiting for you, you know? I'm used to it--"

"No, no no non, there's no need! I have a problem! Is it alright? Can you head back to the classroom?"

"O-Okay, I got it."

Under his ridiculous pressure, I inadvertently nodded my head. But why's the chap so desperate?

Anyway, since he said so, there's no point waiting for him, so I quickly headed towards the changing room.

(The IS suit sweat absorbing function is working almost perfectly. Despite operating for quite a while, it is generally amazing that it is completely not sticky.)

I don't know whether it's because it's developed for space, but even if I'm not certain, I'll treat it as the case.

Alright, finished changing. It's 3 times easier to take it off than to wear it. I use my towel to rub my head and leave the changing room.

"...What is this."

"Hm?"

During lunchtime, all of us are at the roof.

Normally speaking, a high school's roof access will be sealed off due to many reasons, but this IS Academy has no such rules—on the garden that's decorated beautifully , as the seasonal flowers bloom, the floor's of a stone cold floor that makes people think that they're in Europe. As

all the round tables have chairs, on a bright sunny afternoon like this, there would normally be many girls waiting around here to talk.

Maybe everyone ran to the cafeteria to look for Charles ? There's no one here to occupy the space other than us! Yay, we have the entire place!

"Didn't I tell you that I want to come up here to eat since the weather's good?"

"That's not what I'm referring to...!"

Houki glances aside to look at Cecilia, Rin and Charles .

"Since we're having lunch, the more the merrier, isn't it ? Besides, Charles just transferred in, so he doesn't even know where to eat."

"Th-That's true..."

Uu. Houki looks like she wants to say something as she clenches her raised fist. She's holding some home-made bento that's wrapped into a cloth.

As the IS Academy is a boarding school, it seems like they open the kitchen early for the students who want to prepare their own bentos. I went there to look, and found that there were all sorts of utensils that expert chefs would use. As expected of a specially designated school that's controlled directly by the government, the spending's on a completely different level.

--And then, Houki looks like she just made a bento today, and even had my share! Childhood friends are really wonderful.

"Here, Ichika. This is for you."

After saying that, Rin throws the container to me. Hey, don't throw food.

"Wow, it's sweet and sour pork!"

"Yup, I made it this morning! Didn't you say that you wanted to eat it?"

Let me repeat it again, childhood friends are the best! However, to have sweet and sour pork without white

rice, that's a daring innovation! Let me add on, Rin did go to the cafeteria to buy the white rice she wanted to buy here. She's smart.

"Ahem—Ichika-san. For some reason, I woke up earlier as well, so I prepared some things as well. If you like, please try some."

Cecilia opens her basket. There's a stack of neatly arranged sandwiches, however...

"Th-Thanks, I'll eat it later."

I timidly responded. On a side note, Rin's giving a ' wow' expression. Che, this person is either thinking of eating it herself or watching a show.

"What's wrong?"

"No, nothing!"

...Let's just put it this way. This English representative candidate Cecilia Alcott just can't cook—though it looks tasty, the food's just bad. Why must she just add stuff that she doesn't know of? I really, really wanted to

seriously ask her, but right now, I don't have any intention to do so. For some reason, I felt that things would get out of hand if I asked. Why?

Well, I guess, since she's from a prominent family, I guess all rich ojous[2B 6] are like this? She should more or less have a personal chef, so she probably never even tried to choose her ingredients, let alone touch a knife.

Even so, the appearance is great. She herself noted ' shouldn't it be done like how it's like on the book?'. Hm, Cecilia-san, that's not making it like 'how the book describes it', but 'how the photograph describes it'. I really think that it'll be great if you can make it as tasty as how it's described on the book.

"It's because you never said it clearly that the problem continued to persist. Id—iot."

And you dare to say that, Rin. I had the same feelings when you came up with those killer dishes for me. You even had that 'I'll kill you if you say it's not nice!' look!

Oh well, let's forget about that for now. Either way, she did personally prepare this for me, and if possible, I really don't want to say that it tastes bad. Besides, I'm

really grateful for the intention. Besides, since I had to cook my own food before I entered IS Academy City, I'm already grateful that someone can cook for me. Ahh, it would be great if Chifuyu-nee had the same thoughts.

But even so, it still doesn't change the fact that I'm lying. Sigh...

"Huh? Can I really eat together with everyone?"

Sitting beside me, Charles said so. It was the same just now. I'm really bothered by the extent of politeness he's showing.

To be honest, a large number of girls gathered in front of class 1-1 in order to get the 2nd guy, but he managed to refuse them with an extremely polite attitude. Maybe Charles's polite rich boy demeanour caused the girls to feel really awkward if they push on with their self-introductions. Thus, everyone gave up with a happy yet bothered look. Besides, he said,

"I can't let you girls waste your bright sunny time for someone like me. That's because I'll get drunk from such a sweet aroma surrounding me."

And so that's the case.

What should I say? He's amazing. Really, that's what I think, because he's not even acting at all. That sincere attitude of his and the atmosphere that's shining even more brightly that the mysterious presence caused his words to seem even more shining. Besides that, he's really gentle, so it was all the more irresistible. The 3rd year sempai who shook hands with him immediately fainted!

Anyway, the girls gave up just like that, which was why I got him along to eat with us. Though Rin and Cecelia came along, I had no reason to refuse them. It's better to have more people together, right? Since they're both representative candidates, I'm sure they should be able to chat happily about it.

On a side note, strictly speaking, I'm not a representative candidate, I guess. As I'm a guy, I don't know whether this breaks the Alaska Treaty, as it looks like the international community's debating over it.

As for me, I don't really care whether I'm a representative candidate, but it's great to have a personal machine. I once accompanied Houki when she went to

request one for loan, and the paperwork alone nearly made me faint. Those are like, maybe 10 or so pieces of A4 paper? What's the point of writing so much...

"Don't say that. We're guys, so let us get along well. I know there are many inconveniences, but I can help out as well! If you have any problems, just ask me...except for IS."

"You have to work hard."

"I am. There's too much to remember! You already practiced through before you enrolled in, right!?"

"That's true. Though one should have considered about the suitability test, even if there are those who start late, everyone did start studying during middle school."

That seems to be the case. On a side note, Rin started working hard after the 3rd year of Middle School before she had her own personal machine. I really can't imagine how hard she worked.

In terms of the mock battle winning percentage, Rin's 1st, Cecilia's 2nd, Houki's 3rd and I'm last.

"Thanks, Ichika's really kind."

THOMP! *THOMP!*

Though I know that he's a guy, I really have a strange feeling on seeing that defenseless smile of his.

"It, it's alright. Since we're roommates, that's just a formality, just a formality."

"Ichika-san, has he been assigned a room?"

"Well, no, but frankly speaking, he would definitely be assigned in my room. He's a guy anyway."

"Really? Well, I guess so, that makes sense."

We continue to eat lunch as we talk. Rin and I are eating sweet and sour pork, Charles is eating bread that he bought, and it seems like Cecilia bought her own share. This means that the sandwiches were meant to be eaten by me.

In the midst of all these, Houki, who's sitting beside me, hasn't moved her chopsticks at all, or I should say, hasn't even opened the cloth that's wrapped around the bento as she remains silent.

"What's wrong? Is your stomach feeling weird?"

"That's not it..."

"Really? Oh yeah, Houki. If you could hurry up and give me that bento, I would be really happy--"

"..."

Houki silently passed the bento over, and I really don't know how to respond. In the end, even though we were on the same practical group, it doesn't look like the relationship improved. Or rather, it seems like she's still angry, is it...?

"Let's get to it. Oh!"

Opening the bento, I see many dishes with balanced nutrition--including salted grilled salmon, deep-fried chicken, chilli fried konjac burdock, spinach and sesame salad.

"That's amazing! Each dish looks like it took a lot of work."

"I, I just had other reasons. I spent time on it so that I could eat it myself anyway."

"Even so, I'm happy. Thank you, Houki."

"Heh, hehe..."

Even though she looks like she doesn't mind, Houki still looks rather happy as she opens her bento. Of course , her dishes are similar to mine...hold on.

"Houki, why doesn't your bento have any fried chicken?"

"That, that's because, huh..."

For some reason, her eyes seem to waver. What's wrong? Did I ask something I shouldn't have asked?"

"...It can't be helped that those are the only dishes that are nice..."

"Huh?"

"I-I'm on a diet! That's why there's a missing dish. You unhappy!?"

"Not really...but you're not fat anyway."

I don't know whether this declaration's really bad, but I got bombed by Rin and Cecilia who were glaring at me.

"Ah really--, why do people keep thinking that dieting = because she's getting fat."

"Really! That was inconsiderate of you!"

"No, it's just that she really doesn't look like she needs a diet--"

As she's just beside me, I turn to look at her--but with that action, she forcefully pushes my face aside.

"Wh-Where are you looking at!? Stop looking!?"

"What...isn't that the body?"

Obviously, I'm not looking at the face--ack!

"You're looking at a girl's breasts so brazenly!? You, bastard!"

Rin forcefully used her heel to knock onto my back, and four times at that! Stop hitting, stop hitting! It's super painful! Speaking of which, we definitely have a table between us! You're really nimble there...

"Ichika-san really lacks a gentleman's attitude."

Ahh, she's smiling and yet having veins popping out. It seems like Buddha (仏,hotoke) Cecilia's patience has a limit. That's really refreshing...however, to put the England-born her as Cecilia from France (,futsu), that's a little weird.

""ICHIKA!""

My two childhood friends erupted with anger again. How did they even see this little joke of mine? And why are they angry over it? Girls are really unbelievable creatures.

"?"

Unable to understand the situation, Charles reveals a puzzled look. Oh, speaking of which, Charles is born in France! Hm, that works.

"Ichika...what's with you? Your expression really looks rather weird."

"Weird? Oh, like how?"

"Even your tone changed...well, it sounds like a grandfather who's watching his married grandchildren gather for a reunion."

"Not some wise old scholar who loves coffee and history?"

"Hahaha, not like it at all! You're really interesting, Ichika."

Wah, I got denied with a smile. This is the first time I felt an angel's cruelty.

"Ahem! That's enough nonsense. Let's hurry up and eat! Lunchtime's not long enough for us to continue talking like this."

Houki sounded really serious. Hold on, what does that mean?

"Never mind, itadakimasu"

I stuffed a piece of fried chicken into my mouth.

"Woah, it's good!"

As it's a bento, it will naturally go cold if left for a long time. Even so, the fried chicken Houki made was still delicious--the skin was crispy, not soggy at all, and I don't know if she knew that the food would get cold, as there's still the juiciness of the meat in my mouth when I bit it. Even so, what's unbelievable is that it doesn't feel oily, and it does make one want to eat more.

"This had take a lot of work to prepare, right? Let me think. There's grated ginger, soy sauce, and uhm...hmm, what's that? I definitely tasted it before."

"It's garlic. I mixed in a bit of pepper before frying and then added some grated radish to improve the taste."

As it's really good, I was shocked. I really can't tell that this person is the one who made that bland fried rice last month.

But what should I say? This should be what they say. In cooking or housework, once girls remember the basics, they will improve greatly. Guys have to use a lot of time to gain experience before being able to get to an ordinary

standard, so the basic nature is different from girls. I'm really envious and yet unhappy about that.

As for me, my cooking was atrocious at the beginning...but even so, Chifuyu-nee finished off the food even though she grumbled, so that's why I worked hard to learn how to cook better before having the skills I have now.

"But it's really good! Houki, is it really okay for you not to eat it?"

"...I ate all the failures myself, so..."

"Hm?"

"Ah, ahhh? No, it's nothing, nothing at all...anyway, I'm glad that you find it good."

Just now, her words did sound somewhat inaudible. Why did Houki try to cover her volume? Is she saying something that's meant to be left just as it is?

"It's really good. You should eat it, Houki! Here."

Then, I cut the fried chicken till it's large enough to feed a girl and grab it with my chopsticks. Of course, I

placed my left hand underneath to prevent it from dropping.

"Wh-What?"

"Here, eat it."

べ 別に
口が付いて
いてもいいぞ
私は気にしない

あ
あ～ん…

パ

モグ

いいものだな……

うん？
そうなのか？

じゃ はい
あーん

だっ？

ムームー

夏あさん!!

"No, it's not, that, but..."

For some reason, Houki's stuttering. I don't know if I'm thinking too much, but her face does look like she's blushing.

"..."

Her normally razor sharp personality seem to have disappeared out of nowhere, and right now, Houki's just showing a puzzled look as she looks at her bento and my chopsticks.

"..."

"..."

On a side note, two glares are aimed here from beside Houki. It's Rin and Cecilia. What now? Why are you two glaring at me like that--ha! You want to have a piece of the chicken as well?

"Let me explain that. You're definitely thinking about the wrong thing."

"You're thinking about something a posh lady wouldn't do, and that's too rude."

I seem to have guessed wrong. Oh well, whatever.

"Hurry up, Houki! Have some."

"No, it's not, that...yeah, erm...ahem."

Just when I find her smile extremely mysterious, she suddenly clears her throat and frowns. What's with her psychological state?

"Oh, could this be considered what they call 'here, say ah`n' that couples do in Japan? You two are really on such good terms with each other."

The moment Charles finished saying, his face shows a smile that's easy to understand--that smile definitely belongs to an outstanding blond rich prince.

However, once the prince finished, Rin and Cecilia immediately become an immortal tiger and a war goddess.

"Wh-Who said so? How can you say that they're friendly!?"

"That, that's right! I request the right to correct that!"

Both of them continue to pester at Charles, but even in such a situation, his smile still hasn't disappeared. Is this the so-called 'duty of nobility'[2B 7]? Really amazing, France's really amazing.

"Hm, then how about this? Everyone, let's exchange food! If everyone feeds each other, there should be no problems, right?"

"Hm? Oh, I'm okay."

"I, I guess. Since Ichika said that it's alright, I can go along with you people."

"I wasn't intending on taking part in such a crude eating etiquette, but since today's a normal day and we're in Japan, I supposed this should be called 'going along'."

Thus, it seems like everyone's participating.

"Then, I'm starting now!"

After Rin said that, she quickly snatched the piece of fried chicken off my chopsticks.

"Hey, return it now!"

"Um, hm...o! I-It-It's good, it sure is decent."

"Ho, I can do it if I follow the customs."

Even though her fried chicken got taken away, Houki's still looking rather carefree, and Rin looks like she's fighting for something. Really, I don't know what they're thinking.

"Ah-...sorry Houki, but the only piece of chicken left is the one I ate."

"Is, is that so?"

"Yeah. I don't think you want to eat what a guy bit before, right? But if that's the case, I have nothing to give you now, since our other dishes are all the same."

"--It's okay even if it's bitten..."

"Houki?"

"Eve-Even if you...took a bite out of it, I don't mind."

"Hm? Is that so? Then here, ah--"

It seems like we are normally able to say 'here, ah--". Is this a right exclusive to Japanese?"

"Ah, ahh---umph..."

Even though it's somewhat unnaturally, Houki still opened her mouth after saying that as she ate the chicken . Seeing her face, I find that maybe she's somewhat embarrassed. Hm, is it really weird to be fed after becoming a high school student?

"It, it's good..."

"Isn't it? This chicken's delicious."

"Though I'm not referring to that...but, it's good."

I don't know what the reasons are, but it seems like she became happy. That's good.

"Here, Ichika! Have some of my sweet and sour pork. Hurry up and eat it!"

"Ichika-san! Please have some sandwiches! I'll give you all of it!"

Rin and Cecilia immediately squeezed over. What's going on!?

""HERE!!""

Both of them squeezed their food over that me, and they seem to have giving a similar 'here, ah--' action.

"Hold, hold on a minute. I have sweet and sour pork here, and it's weird to have it go along with sandwiches, so I think I'll have it--"

""..."

Ahh, what the heck, using silence to make me unable to make a comeback (or rather, ending up causing a breakdown in the dialogue). If these two are to live in the Three Kingdoms, they should be able to become military strategists, and then there'll be a fantasy Five Kingdoms... or maybe not.

"I-Itadakimasu..."

Sigh, really, why can't guys lift their heads in front of girls? Ever since year 2000, it's been the same, so it's mostly due to history? I guess that's right.

Anyway, let's start from Rin's sweet and sour pork.

"Hm, it's nice...but Rin, why's your food warm?"

"I used a microwave to heat it up when I bought rice."

Couldn't you have heated up mine...but anyway, it's still nice even when it's cold.

"Ahem! Then, please try my hand-made sandwiches."

"Um...I-itadakimasu."

I really can't say no to Cecilia when she's showing me a shy look of friendship, and can only take a bite off her sandwich.

WAHH...it's ridiculously sweet! What the heck? What's in there? She definitely put vanilla extract inside. That's right. I can't even taste anything else. But it's

abnormally sweet. Why is a tomato and bacon sandwich so sweet? I could think of 120 explanations if it were just an egg sandwich...

"How is it?"

Ugh, it's best that I answer...

"It's better if you say the truth earlier."

Rin said so casually and continues to eat her own sweet and sour pork. What she said does make sense, and it's correct after all. But, that, what should I say? Doesn't she feel that it's hard to tell a girl that her cooking's lousy?

"Oh, ohh yeah, it's good...I, I kind of liked it."

Sigh--I just chose to say something nice. Really, I'm really sad that I don't have the guts to say my true thoughts.

"Is that so! Then, please have the rest!"

Cecilia's eyes immediately brightened as she quickly passes the entire basket to me. Well, if I treat it as dessert, I should be able to eat it down.

"Id--iot."

Rin continues to drink the packaged oolong tea that she most likely bought together with the white rice as she criticized me. Ah, whatever, I'm just an idiot, I'm an idiot. ..

"But, really, I feel similar to that. Like a growing bird."

Good thing there's no other students on the roof other than us--speaking of which, if there were other people around, I definitely wouldn't do this. Besides, it's really embarrassing to be fed like this when I'm so old.

But Houki doesn't look like she minds. Perhaps it's just a guy's thing?

"Ya, yeah, I guess, but it's not bad to be like this once in a while."

"That, that's right. Hm, that's not bad at all."

Rin and Cecilia nod their heads. Maybe I'm thinking too much, but both of them are blushing somewhat. Hey, don't tell me now that you find it embarrassing! I'll feel even worse as I was the one being fed!

"I-Ichika, is there anything you like to eat?"

Houki suddenly said such a thing.

"I-It can't be helped. Let me feed you something."

"Th-There's no need. Besides, we have similar dishes other than the fried chicken. If you give your share to me, Houki, wouldn't you have none left?"

"Mu...you're right..."

"Speaking of which, everyone, hurry up and finish eating! I don't want to run after eating, since Charles and I still have to head to the changing room at the arena."

Though the hangar's closer to the arena, I remember we can use the changing room of the first arena, and the hangar's at the 4th arena, so in the end, we have to run twice. So if we end up spending too much time eating, we have to run quite some distance after that. Please spare me the agony.

"Hm, Ichika? Don't tell me you take off your IS suit after a practical?"

"What? Can't I?"

Hearing Rin say that, I asked back. Don't tell me--

"Half of the girls keep them on, you know? It's really troublesome."

Che, I see...well, it's sweat-absorbent and doesn't obstruct movement, so it's okay to wear it.

"If that's the case."

Not just Rin, even Houki and Cecilia are wearing it? I can't really tell with their clothes on. Hm, I really feel that the girls have it easy. My IS suit will wrap my ankles, so I really don't want to have another pair of pants over it. It'll feel stiff...I don't think that will happen, but it'll be hot.

"Di-Didn't I tell you not to continue staring at a girl's body like that!? You pervert!!"

"Huh? No, I don't mean that--"

"Who, who cares about what you mean, that's not gentlemanly at all!"

"I was just observing--"

"Wh-What's with you saying that you're 'observing' a girl's body? That's inconsiderate!"

...What's inconsiderate about it here...

Speaking of which, why I am ganged up by them?

Sigh...after sighing, I gave up on trying to make a comeback. Anyway, right now, I just want to focus on eating the bento. As every dish's delicious (my bad, except for Cecilia's), once I start tucking in, I would naturally continue to eat.

"....."

"What's wrong, Ichika?"

Without any reason at all, I turn to look at Charles, who's sitting opposite the girls.

Of course, Charles didn't lecture me. Even when I'm staring at him, he's not angry at me. He's even concerned about me.

"It's great to have guys."

I'm dead serious. From today onwards, I will have a strong partner of the same gender! That's awesome. Maybe the school will even give us time to let us use the giant bath.

Right now, it seems that due to several reasons, as a guy, I can't use the giant onsen. Even though the school mentioned that I can use it as long as they separate the bathroom, this seemed to have caused a large number of protests from the students. They said 'if there's a guy who'll come in after we go out, we wouldn't know how to go in anymore!' or something like that...huh, can't you just do it like in a normal giant bath?

On a side note, if I'm to start before the girls, it seems like there will be a lot more problems, and there's even more protests. 'if we're to bath after a guy, how are we going to use it!' or at least that's what they said...like bathing in a large onsen, I'll omit the rest. Please read the above.

Anyway, it's really too wasteful to come up with a divide just for one person, so I never had a chance to use the dorm's onsen. To a person who likes to take baths, it's not much different from being interrogated.

"Is, is that so? I don't know what you mean, but it's great that Ichika feels that it's alright."

Maybe he's just shy, as Charles just sounded really stiff .

"...What's good about having guys..."

"...How unhealthy..."

"...An idiot who hasn't even realised what's going on..."

The three girls seem to mutter softly. I don't know what's going on, but I guess it's best not to ask.

After that, for some reason, I got blank white eyes from this trio of girls. Why's that? I really don't understand how girls think.

"Then, please let me repeat this again. It's nice to meet you."

"Yeah, nice to meet you too, Ichika."

It's night. After finishing dinner, Charles and I return back to our room. As he's the second boy, while we were in the cafeteria, we were surrounded and assaulted with questions. It looked like it was going to continue on like that, but luckily it ended just in time.

And I really don't know whether it's obvious, but Charles and I are in the same room. As we're resting after dinner, we're drinking the Japanese tea I just brewed.

"This tastes really different from red tea. It's weird, but nice."

"It's great that you like it. If we have a chance next time , let's go drink some matcha."

On a side note, it seems that Cecilia can't take Japanese tea, so she doesn't drink it at all. It seems like she's repulsed by the color. Is green really that strange?

"Matcha's the thing that's to be drunk on tatami mats, right? I heard that it needs a special skill. Do you know how to brew it, Ichika?"

"Matcha has to be 'set up', not brewed. But I've only drunk a simple sample of it. Right now, they're selling

some matcha coffee in front of a station, and it does taste like coffee."

"Oh I see. I want to go along next time to try it once."

"Alright, I'll bring you along then. Besides, it's a rare chance, so let's go out for a Sunday trip, okay?"

"Really? I'm really excited. Thank you Ichika."

I know that this gentle smiling Charles is a guy, but my heart started to pound. Maybe it is because he feels so mature? I don't really know how to respond once he shows a straightforward smile.

"It, it's nothing. I haven't drunk matcha for a long time, so I'll bring you along."

"Oh ho, thank you."

Maybe he's seeing me blush now? There's a gentle presence in Charles's smile. As my impression of a family was always living together with Chifuyu-nee, I don't really know how it feels, but perhaps this is what they call 'a family-style smile'.

Normally speaking, that smile can calm anyone down, but it's making me jumpy for some reason. Anyway, let's talk about something else.

"Yeah--then how should we shower? We can go by how the day proceeds."

"Ah? I'll shower later. You can use it first, Ichika."

"U? Huh, now that you mention it, I'll feel rather apologetic...after a practical, you would most likely have a day when you want to rush to the shower, right Charles?"

"No, I'm okay, I don't really sweat, so I don't really mind even if I don't get to rush into the shower."

"Really? Then I'll accept that then. But you don't really have to worry too much about me. We're both guys anyway."

"Erm, thanks."

After saying that, he smiles again. Ahh I get it. As Charles's method of thanking is too natural, anyone's heart will race on seeing that smile.

"Speaking of which, I heard that Ichika always has special IS training after school. Is that true?"

"Yeah, I started off later than the rest, so I can only train to make up for it."

As Charles is moving in today (but he didn't bring his luggage), I stopped training for one day. However, I have to start training from tomorrow onwards, since there's still the indiviudal division tournament this month.

"Can I join in? I want to thank you, and I have my personal machine, so I should be able to help out."

"Oh, that'll be great! Sorry to bother you then."

"Mn, leave it to me."

Just like that, having obtained a partner in public and in private, I managed to sleep comfortably with a sense of relaxation.

Chapter 3: Blue Days/Red Switch

"So the reason why Ichika can't beat Alcott-san and Rin-san is mainly because you haven't grasped the nuances of ranged weapons."

"Is, is that so? I thought I should have understood..."

It's been the fifth day since Charles came here, and today's Saturday. In the IS Academy, Saturday mornings are for theory lessons, and afternoons are free. As the arenas are completely open on Saturdays, almost all students will use the time to practice. I'm one of them as well, as Charles and I exchanged a few moves with each other while he lectures me about IS battles.

"Mm-yeah, it may sound like I'm using some half-baked knowledge, but when you fought against me, you almost couldn't close the distance in, right?"

"Um...that's true, even the [Ignition Boost] was seen through..."

"That's because Ichika's IS can only fight in close range, so if you downplay the characteristics of ranged weapons

, you can't win in a battle. Also, Ichika's ignition boost goes in a straight line, so even if I can't react in time, I can use the trajectory to predict the attack."

"A straight attack...hm."

"Ah, but it's better not to forcefully try to change the trajectory. The air resistance or pressure will cause additional burden on the machine, and in the worst case scenario, may even cause fractures."

"...I see."

I listened seriously to Charles as I continued to nod my head.

That's because Charles' explanation is too easy to understand.

"Like, *rip*-- after I do that, there will be *klang!* * Donk dong!* feeling."

"Your instincts should be able to understand, right? Use your feelings, feelings...whaa? Why can't you understand that, idiot!"

"When you defend, the right part of your body must tilt forward by 5 degrees, and when dodging, you must turn in the opposite direction by 20 degrees."

So far, those three who call themselves coaches have just given me such welcoming words. In all sense, I was already at a dead end, and the savior Charles Dunois appeared. This grace is so touching that I can't express it in words. What's even better is that there's no need to think too much if it's between guys.

(Speaking of which, the IS suit is really too revealing...)

It doesn't matter if it's just an ordinary battle, but training's just training. To be honest, my eyes will accidentally look at other places, so it's really hard to move.

"Humph, that's because you didn't listen to my suggestion."

"I made it so easy to understand already, and yet you couldn't understand."

"Do you have any dissatisfaction against my clear and elaborate explanation?"

Sigh...and the three so-called personal coaches of mine were muttering behind me.

Like I just said. The arenas are completely available on Saturday afternoons, so in this third arena, there're a lot of students who are seriously studying. However, it seems like as the only two guys training here, there's a lot more people who want to use the 3rd arena as it looks like it's about to overflow. Right now, many of other groups have been knocking into each other or being hit by stray bullets. That's really tough. So far, I've already knocked into other people thrice.

"Doesn't Ichika's [Byakushiki] have an equalizer?"

Oh, Charles-sensei started to speak, and I have to listen. Maybe it seems that as a guy, it's easier for me to understand another guy, so as of right now, I'm just like a sponge that can absorb water.

"Oh yeah, I asked others to check a few times, but it seems like there are no more expansion slots, so everyone told me that it's impossible to add on."

"It's just my guess, but the capacity is used on a one-off ability."

"What do you mean by a one-off ability?"

"As what the name says, it's a 'one and only' ability, and it's an ability that occurs naturally when IS pilots are in maximum synergy with their IS."

From how he was about to describe it so fluently, I can tell how outstanding Charles is.

"But most of the time, it appears in second phase. Even so, as there are so many machines that haven't discovered such power, there are 3rd generation IS that can allow multiple users to use a unique ability. Alcott-san's [Blue Tears] and Rin-san's [Impact Cannons] should be the same."

"I see. So [Byakushiki]'s unique point is the [Reiraku Byakuya], right?"

As long as it attacks something that has an energy source, it can negate and destroy it--that's the most powerful attack of the [Byakushiki], however, activating it will deplete its own shields and energy fast. It can be described as a cursed weapon, a double-edged sword.

"[Byakushiki] actually has that ability even though it's in its 1st shift, and that alone is rather abnormal because

there's no precedence in such an ability. And its ability is even similar to Orimura-sensei's--first generation [Brunhilde], right?"

That seems to be the same. Chifuyu-nee's weapon is the same as mine, and even the IS design's the same. It's really hard to explain.

"But can't that be explained as us being siblings?"

"That's not enough, I don't think that just being siblings is enough to establish a reason. I just mentioned that it's important for IS pilots to have synergy with the machine. So no matter how we try to emphasize on it, it's not enough to deliberately cause such a thing.

"Is that so? But anyway, we still can't think of an answer even after thinking so long, so let's forget about it for now."

"Hm, that's right. Then, let's have some shooting practice! Here, this is for you."

After Charles said that, he passed me the 0.55 caliber assault rifle [Vent].

"Huh? Aren't we unallowed to use other people's weapons?"

"Normally, but if the owner unlocks it, everyone can use it as long as they're registered. Hm, right now, I allowed Ichika to use it with [Byakushiki]. Try shooting it ."

This is the first time I'm holding a gun, and I find it unexpectedly heavy. As the IS has an energy field, normally speaking, I shouldn't be able to feel the weight. This is the first time I'm holding a weapon, so most likely , that's the reason why there's a mental feeling.

"I, I just need to hold it like this, right?"

"Let me see...close your armpit down and move your left arm here, got that?"

Charles got behind me, and though there's a difference in our height, he used the floating feature of the IS to nimbly guide my arms.

"And as it's a firearm, there will be lots of recoil, but the IS will almost negate it completely, so you don't have to worry. Can you do a connection detection?"

"You're talking about that option when using firearms, right? I was looking for it since just now, but I couldn't find it."

As I'm shooting in hi-speed, I definitely need a super hi-grade sensor. That's to include the required signal when the enemy's in firing range for the IS pilot to detect. The weapons and sensors have to be linked together, but ever since the beginning, [Byakushiki] doesn't even have such an option.

"Hm--even if it's a close-ranged machine, normally speaking, there should be one..."

"I feel that this is a flawed machine."

"Maybe it's a 100% close combat fighter frame. Well, it can't be helped. You can use just your eyes to judge."

Ohh, to think that I actually have such disadvantageous conditions while shooting for the first time. But it's useless to complain now. Anyway, let's shoot first.

"I'm firing then."

"Well, I guess once you shoot, you should find it rather different."

I can't understand the feeling if I don't try it myself, so what Charles said should be correct. Anyway, I take a deep breath and force my strength into the trigger.

BAM!

"WOAH!"

The explosion of the firearm was too loud, and it shocked me. So I can hear such a loud sound even when shooting?

"How is it?"

"Ah, ahh, I don't know. The first thing that came to my mind was 'fast'."

I understand that a bullet's speed is really fast, but after firing it, this became even more obvious.

"Go-Got it."

Besides, my body got hit by the recoil—though most of the power was worn off, and this is the first time I

experienced such a different feeling from a sword, so my heart started to pound like crazy.

"That's right. It's fast. Though Ichika's [Ignition Boost] is fast, the bullet is small in size, so its speed increases at a faster rate. Thus, if the enemy predicts the trajectory, it would be easy to hit you, and even if it didn't, it can suppress an enemy. It's right for Ichika to have an attacking mindset, but there still has to be a brake in your heart."

"So that's why the distance kept getting away and the enemy started to attack me..."

"Mn."

...I see. So that's the reason? Eliminating Houki, who specialises in close range, it's no wonder that whenever I fought against Rin or Cecilia, I always ended up being attacked...I see. I can finally understand now.

"I already explained so many times that it was like that ...!"

"So you didn't even know that? Sigh, what an idiot."

"I almost wanted to say that you almost understood. Why did you still chose to fight like that when you're practically underestimating yourself?"

Ahh, what's going on? I seem to have some people rolling their eyes behind me as they said to me—hm, a conversation is important, so we should talk more to understand each other more. It's because we don't understand each other so well that we ended up having miscommunications on so many different aspects.

"Ah, please continue trying. It's alright to use up one magazine."

"Okay, thanks."

After calming myself down more than before, I shot 2-3 rounds. I felt the impact spread through the shoulders and throughout my entire body as I continued to think of how to close the distance.

"Speaking of which, is Charles' IS a [Revive]?"

"Mn, that's right. Ah, your arms are open. Close your armpits tight again."

"Is, is that so...like this?"

"Ok! Also, try to let the gun's sights remain in front of your eyes. You can't shoot accurately if you tilt your head !"

I continue to accept his guidance as I ask something that I've been wondering about.

"As for that IS, it looks very different from the one Yamada-sensei's using. Are they really the same model?"

The IS [Raphael Revive] (commonly called the Revive) that Yamada-sensei uses has 4 deep blue multi-directional thrusters on the exterior. In contrast, Charles IS is different in colour and design. The pair of thrusters on the back of Charles' IS look like 2 sets of wings that're divided down the middle, which increases the mobility and acceleration. Also, the armor has somewhat been modified from Yamada-sensei's machine. In terms of the weapon box, it seem to have one huge box behind with another small thruster on it. It seems it's used for maintaining balance. However, the biggest difference in all these is that the 4 blocks of physical shields that were attached onto the shoulders were all removed. What replaced them is an arm-sized shield on

the left arm and a cooling exterior on the right arm to prevent any disturbances when firing.

"Oh, that's because its been customized for me, so a lot of things were modified. The actual name of this baby is [Raphael-Revive Custom II]. The functionality has been multiplied after removing a few pieces of equipment."

"Multiplied? That's amazing...I really hope you can share some with me."

"Hahaha, I'm okay with giving you one. As it's custom-made, right now, it has about 20 equalizers.

"Wow—that feels somewhat like an armory."

In fact, since they were all weapons that were specialized for IS, it wasn't something that could be brought over with just 'somewhat'...what I said wasn't an exaggeration at all. The firepower's basically equivalent to 10 tanks...or more seriously, hundreds of them.

However, Cecilia and Rin have only about 5 IS equipment slots, or at the most 8. That's because it's impossible to use all the weapons that are stored up. More importantly, considering the waiting time needed to summon a weapon, there's no point in having more.

And that custom machine of his should have been made with these considerations, so maybe Charles has some unique skills?

"Huh, look at that..."

"No way, that's the 3rd generation German model."

"I heard that it's still in the testing phase in their country..."

The arena started to buzz all of a sudden. I just used up an entire magazine of 16 rounds, so I turned to look at where everyone's looking at.

"..."

Standing over there was the other transfer student, the German representative candidate, Laura Bodewig.

Ever since the moment when she first transferred in, she had never interacted with anyone in class, let alone say a single word. She's a lonely and proud girl.

On a side note, I haven't talked to her at all. That's because she slapped me for no good reason, so I don't

really know how to talk to her...u--yeah, how about a smile?

"Hey."

A voice could be heard from the IS communication channel. As it happened on the first time, I could never forget that voice. It's Laura herself.

"...What."

Though I didn't really want to answer, I couldn't just ignore her. After I answered her casually, Laura continued to speak as she glided down.

"It seems like you possess a personal IS. If that's the case, it's simple. Fight me."

What's this person saying? Does she like to fight?

"Nope. I have no reason to fight you."

"You don't, I do."

Ahh, I see--Germany, Chifuyu-nee. I can link these two events together to remember one thing. It's the finals of the 2nd Mondo Grosso.

That's a memory I myself personally don't want to remember, yet it's etched deeply within me.

--Basically, on the day of the finals, I got abducted by a mysterious organization. This mysterious organization--this isn't even a name in a movie script...how lousy is that . However, they were so mysterious that there's no other way to describe them, and since it's a mysterious organization, I suppose it should be alright to describe them as such.

Nobody knows why they did that. Anyway, I got abducted and locked into a pitch black place. As it was dark all around, I lost all feelings for a while, but after a while, the room suddenly shook due to an impact, and after the wall collapsed, what appeared under the rays of light that shone in was Chifuyu-nee in an IS. It seems like she got notification from the finals arena and flew directly here.

That's right. At that time, I couldn't forget how Chifuyu-nee looked. Suave, overpowering and beautiful.

Thus, the finals naturally ended up with Chifuyu-nee losing on default. She didn't manage to complete her bi-championship, and as everyone believed that Chifuyu-nee would win, her decision to forfeit was quite the shock.

Though the fact remains that I was abducted, at the time, the German military managed to obtain information through their unique reconnaissance. And then, as a condition, the Germans got 'compensation' for providing information to save me. After the tournament, Chifuyu-nee became an instructor for a year.

After that, she disappeared for a while and suddenly reappeared before becoming an IS Academy instructor.

"If it wasn't for your existence, instructor would have easily reclaimed the championship, so I will never, ever, agree to your existence."

...And that seemed to be the case. As Chifuyu-nee's student, Laura must practically worship her strength. That's why Laura hates me for breaking Chifuyu-nee's perfect, undefeated record. Well, I guess I can

understand her feelings, because I'm the same as well. To be honest, I couldn't forgive myself for being so weak that day.

However, that's different from the situation now, and that's not enough reason for me to fight Laura. At least, I don't want to fight.

"Maybe next time."

"Humph, since that's the case. I'll make you fight me."

After she said that, Laura switched her black IS into battle mode. At that moment, the large missile that was equipped on her left arm immediately shot out.

BAM!

"Suddenly starting battle in such an enclosed space. Germans are really hot tempered, huh? So are your people's beers and brains hot?"

"You..."

Butting in, Charles used his shield to deflect the live bullet and pointed the .61 [Garm] sub-machine gun on his right hand at Laura.

"To think that the likes of a second generation French IS is standing in my way."

"It's probably more mobile than your third generation German model which still can't be mass produced."

They glared at each other coolly. Though I'm shocked by Charles interfering, I'm more impressed that he managed to summon his equipment so quickly.

He managed to summon the weapon immediately in 1 -2 seconds and even aim at the enemy. I see, it's because of that that he's able to have so many equalizers? He can probably choose the most suitable weapon for battle even if he doesn't summon it and reload at the same time. In other words, he has an overwhelming advantage in an endurance fight, and can even switch his own weapons to counter the enemy's.

I can finally understand why Charles is a representative candidate and why his machine's a customized one.

"You students over there! What are you doing! State your year, class and register number!"

An audio broadcast can be heard. Most likely, the teacher who's in charge came rushing over.

"...Humph. I'll retreat for today."

Maybe her enthusiasm was curbed because someone interrupted her, Laura casually got rid of her battle mode and left the arena through the gates, although it's very likely that the extremely angry teacher that is standing over there, seeing Laura's personality, will pretend not to notice her.

"Are you okay, Ichika?"

"Oh, yeah, I'm okay. Thanks."

The sharp expression that Charles showed when he faced off against Laura several seconds back disappeared , and right now, he's looking concerned as he observes me.

"That's it for today's training. It's already past 4, and the arena's closing soon anyway."

"Ah, that's good. Oh ya, thanks for your gun. I got quite the lesson here."

"That's good."

He smiled again. Though that lack of defensive mindset often caused me to feel anxious, the problem is always what happens next.

"Huh...we'll go back after you change."

That's right. It happened all the time. After the IS practicals, Charles never changed clothes with me...it's not that he's unwilling, but he never changed clothes with me after practicals. The only time he changed clothes with me was on the day when he first transferred in. After that, he either changed into the IS suit or headed out faster and changed faster than me.

And what's even more weird is that Charles, who would guide me through so earnestly during practicals, would become really stiff once we returned back to our room—

"Hu—that's refreshing...ah, you can use the shower."

"I-Ichika, why aren't you wearing clothes?"

"I am. I'm just wearing shorts."

"Uu, you have to wear something on top. And, and also, dry your hair."

"Ahh, no need to be so troublesome."

"You, you have to. Ichika has to be properly dressed up!"

"We're both guys, so there's no problems! Speaking of which, Charles, you always dress up nicely before going out. Well, you don't have to worry too much about me."

"I-Ichika! You should think about others more! Ahh that's enough! I'm leaving you alone!"

--We used to have such conversations. I don't really know why, but Charles would start to nag at me when we're alone. It's more like 'he started to tell me off after being unable to stand it'.

Hm, is Charles the naggy mother type? I don't really understand how parents really are, so I tried to imagine it from what I heard from Gotanda. Such words should be said by a mother, right?

Let's not talk about that...since we're already roommates, and are guys, we should use this chance to

build our relationship with each other. Alright, time to convince him.

"We should occasionally change clothes together."

"No, no."

"Don't be so heartless."

"Instead of being heartless, why do you want to change clothes with me, Ichika?"

"Well, then why doesn't Charles want to change clothes with me?"

Though it's really classless to answer a question using a question, I have to be more forceful in order to deal with Charles. That was what I learnt during the past few days, so there shouldn't be any problems.

"Why...that's, that's because, I-I'll feel awkward..."

This chap's really weird. Though Charles himself looks rather slender, he does look like he trained his body. If that's the case, what's there to be embarrassed about?"

"There won't be any problems once you get used to it. Come on, let's go change together."

"No, that, that..."

Maybe he's still thinking of an excuse as he looks around—alright, time to give him a nudge.

"Hey, Charles--"

WAH!

"Okay, okay, hurry up and go change. You won't have any friends if you don't know how to hold back."

I got choked on the neck from behind. Wah, this is killing me! Let go, Rin! RIN!

"Ah, ahem...if you want to find someone to change with, well, I'm not too willing, but it can't be helped. I, I can change with you—"

"We're changing as well, Cecilia. Hurry up and get over here."

"Houki, Houki-san! Don't grab my neck—I, I got it! I'll go over! Okay okay okay! I'll obediently change in the girls' changing room!"

Just when Cecilia was about to argue, Houki forcefully grabbed her by the back of the neck and pulled her back... what? Is such a skill required to be a childhood friend?

(Speaking of which, the girls' have been calling each other by their own names since who knows when.)

Though they looked like they didn't meet eye to eye, I guess that can be explained by them being with each other for a while. It seems that they can call each other by their names now.

I got it, it's that, right? Fighting at the riverbank until the sun set—and then starting to talk? 'You're good', 'you too' kind of thing, right? Hold on. If that's the case, doesn't that mean that they have to fight against each other? No way, I'm against violence.

"Rin."

"What?"

"I'm against violence."

"THIS IS CALLED VIOLENCE!"

How rude. Knocking me on the head like that, I just said that I'm against violence!

"Who asked you to raise an objection before I even hit you, idiot."

No matter what, I don't want to be hit continuously. The arena's about to close. Better go change now.

"I'm going off then."

"Ah, okay."

After saying that to Charles, I headed towards the gate . As I've gotten used to accelerating and stopping suddenly, my IS control is more or less refined now.

"But speaking of which, this sure is luxurious."

In the empty changing room, there are already about 50 lockers, and the room's naturally as wide as it

indicates. I transformed [Byakushiki] back into the standby mode as I sat down on the bench and took off the IS suit.

"Sigh—I really want a bath..."

Though the suit can really absorb sweat, it doesn't change the fact that I sweat, so to be honest, I really want to relax my body and soul. According to rumors, as there are 2 guys in school now, it seems like Yamada-sensei is rescheduling the onsen usage time. Thank you very much.

"Alright, I'm done changing."

It's easy for guys to change clothes, it will be over after I just think about something.

"Excuse me, are Orimura-kun and Dunois-kun inside?"

"What's wrong? Huh, only Orimura's inside."

I heard the call of someone from otuside. The owner of the voice should be Yamada-sensei. Speaking of the devil .

"Can I come in—? Are you changing—?"

Why is it that voices will drag when they're calling someone from afar? It really can't be explained...but that goes for me as well.

"Ah, no problems. I'm done changing, so please enter."

The door swooshed open, and Yamada-sensei walked in. The opening chorus of compressed air was as cool-sounding as ever.

"Isn't Dunois-kun with you? I heard that he was training together with Orimura-kun."

"Ah, he's still in the arena. Maybe he went back to the control zone. What's up? If it's really important, I can call him over."

"Ah, it's not really anything major, so please pass the message to him. From the end of this month onwards, both of you can use the onsen. As there will be problems allocating times to allow you to use it, we decided to allow you to use the onsen twice every week."

"IS THAT TRUE!?"

What do you mean it's not something important? This is something important! I can finally take a bath now! I'm

so touched that I couldn't help but grab Yamada-sensei's hands and say,

"I'M SO HAPPY, THAT'S WONDERFUL! THANK YOU YAMADA-SENSEI!"

"It-It's alright. It's my job anyway..."

Maybe that's true, but right now, I'm so thankful and overwhelmed with emotions that I really want to express my thanks.

"No no no. It's all because of Yamada-sensei's great work. Thank you very much!"

"Is, is that so? Saying it like that, I'm getting really embarrassed, hahaha..."

At that moment, I just realised that there's only both of us in the changing room, and I'm holding onto a female teacher's hands so passionately—what should I say? I feel an ominous presence that indicates that something bad is about to happen.

"...Ichika? What are you doing?"

ACK!

...What, so it's Charles? Phew.

"Ah, no. It's nothing."

I suddenly let go of my hands. Maybe it's really embarrassing that Charles had to say this to me. Yamada-sensei immediately turned her back at me after I let go of her hands.

"Ichika, I should have told you to go back first."

"Oh yeah, you did. Sorry."

Phew, why do I feel that Charles sounded really vexed ? But he's giving the same look. Maybe I'm thinking too much.

"Charles, I got good news for ya. We can use the onsen starting from the end of this month!"

"Oh."

Having removed his IS, Charles glanced at me, who's all pumped up, as he starts to rubs his head with a towel.

Uu—hm, seems like he's not feeling too good. But it's such rare good news, and his response is so dull. It's really somewhat anti...

"Ah, that's right. I still need Orimura-kun for something. I got some documents for you to fill, so can you please come to the office? As it's related to the official registration of [Byakushiki], there's a lot of pages. "

"Got it—then Charles, This will take quite some time, so you can use the bathroom first."

"Mn, got it."

"Then let's go, Yamada-sensei."

Closing the doors up, Charles, who's alone in the dormitory room, sighed. Maybe he endured it up till now , as the sigh he unconsciously let out was much deeper than what he expected, shocking even himself.

(What am I frustrated about...)

Recalling the attitude he showed in the changing room , it was really shameful on his part. It's likely that Ichika should be even more shocked, causing his mood to worsen.

(...Let's take a shower to lighten the mood.)

Charles pulled out a change of clothes from his own cupboard and walked towards the bathroom.

"Hoo—done, done."

There were a lot of documents alright, but they're just things that need to be signed, so it's not as time-consuming as I thought it would be.

So now I'm the official pilot of the [Byakushiki]...hm, but that's just what the documents mean, so there shouldn't be any drastic changes, right?

"I'm back—hm, that's strange? Charles isn't here."

Thinking about this, I hear the sound of water in the bathroom.

(Oh, he's bathing—speaking of which, he did tell me that we ran out of bathing foam.)

Remembering what Charles said, I pulled out the pre-prepared bathing foam from my cupboard. Since I had thought that I would be the one bathing first, I thought I should fill it up while bathing.

(Hmm—Charles probably doesn't know what to do. Let's just take it to him.)

The bathing room is separated from the sink and the changing area, so I should just head to the changing area and call him, I guess.

After thinking about that, I head towards the sink.

Klak

--*Klak*?

Huh. I just opened the room, and it's too strange to hear such a sound...ah, did Charles open the bathroom door? He should be looking for bathing foam.

"Ah, nice timing, this is the refill—"

"I-I-I...chika...?"

"Wha...?"

A 'girl' I didn't recognise walked out of the bathroom.

--How can I tell? It's simple, she has breasts.

Her drenched hair is blond and curly with such softness and elasticity, and she has nice long legs on her slender body. Her slender waist also indicates larger breasts than what they should be.

Her blond hair and purple eyes clearly show that she's not Japanese. Maybe it's because of that the breasts are probably at least size C no matter the measurements. It's really unbelievably eye-catching. The crystal clear skin carried beads of water on them, and they looked as beautiful as diamonds.

Anyway, the girl was completely naked, and though I wanted to look away, my eyes continued to stare involuntarily.

"Huh, well~, that..."

I seem to realise where I had met this naked girl before , but as my mind's in a mess, I really can't arrange my thoughts well. Let me think, blond hair...blond--?

"KYAHH!!"

BAM!

Suddenly recovering, the girl hurriedly covers her breasts and escapes back into the bathroom.

"..."

"...Wh-at..."

The person on the other side of the door doesn't say anything. It's likely that she's like me, not knowing what to do.

"I-I'll, I'll leave the bathing foam here..."

"O-Okay..."

After this conversation that ended with a questionable outcome, I placed the bottle in front of the bathroom door and left the changing area.

Huh, what's the situation now? Logically, Charles should be inside the showers now--mu, so it was Charles just now?

Speaking of which, she does look like Charles. If he was to let the hair he ties up down, it's likely he would look like that. But that's not the main problem.

(But it's weird. Why does Charles have breasts? That's right, breasts--)

I can't shake off the image that's imprinted into my eyes.

(Her breasts...are pretty)

I'M AN IDIOT! THAT'S NOT THE MAIN POINT! No, I can't deny it completely.

(Damn it, it's better not to think too much. Burn till thy heart is cooled off, and everything shall be dreams amongst dreams.)

Klak...

"!?"

The changing area door opened softly, but to me, that's a lot louder than anything else, causing my body to freeze.

"I-I'm done..."

"I-I see."

The voice that came from behind did belong to Charles . I tried my best to ignore my rapidly beating heart as I slowly turned around.

A girl was standing over there.

"..."

"..."

I guess it's about an hour since we got like this? The girl in front of me--or rather, Charles herself--is facing me as both of us sit on the bed, but our eyes waver as we let time pass silently.

"Ah--that..."

As there hasn't been any progress, I opened my mouth to speak, and the female version of Charles trembled... there's no need to be so shocked, right...

"Would you like some tea?"

"Huh, okay, I'll have some..."

Both of us probably agreed that it was better to have something to drink while talking. At this point, this was the first time I realized that we had the same idea. Anyway, I boiled the water using the electric kettle and poured it into the teapot.

"..."

"..."

Both of us sank into silence before the tea was prepared. But this couldn't be helped. I just hoped that the tea leaves would dissolve faster.

"It's done. Here."

"Oh, thank you--KYAH!!"

As my hand passes the teacup to her, I touched her fingers, causing her to recoil in shock. In this situation, I nearly dropped the teacup onto the floor. And just when I re-grabbed the cup, the tea landed on my hand due to the reaction.

"HOT HOT! WATER, WATER!"

I rushed towards the basin and turned the faucet to the maximum. The gush of water cooled my hand down. At least I managed to settle it without creating such a serious situation.

"So-Sorry! Are you okay?"

"Sor-Sort of. I cooled it off with cold water immediately. There shouldn't be any scalding."

"Le-Let me see...ahh, it's all red now. I'm sorry."

Panicking, Charles ran over to my side and pulled my hand, looking at the place where I got scalded with tea-water painfully.

"I'll get ice over here immediately!"

"Hol-Hold on, wait a minute. There'll be problems if you go out like this. I'll go get it on my own."

Like usual, Charles' wearing a clean cut and suave sports jacket, but maybe due to the fact that her identity is exposed, she's not wearing anything to restrain the breasts, and the clothing she's wearing will clearly show

her figure, so one can immediately tell that she has breasts.

"However--"

"More importantly than the ice...that, how am I going to go about with this...your breasts, they're pressing against my body..."

"!!!"

After I mentioned this, Charles finally noticed her positioning. She jumped away from me like she was flying, looking like she wants to cover her breasts as she hugged her own body.

"..."

Though it's faint, Charles' definitely giving me a look of protest that all girls would have.

"And I was worried about you...Ichika no ecchi[2C 1] ..."

"Why's that?"

What's she talking about!? She's treating me like a bad guy, totally illogical! I'm being slandered, I tell ya, slandered!

Maybe it was just my imagination, but Charles wasn't just giving a look of protest, there was also a look of embarrassment and yet happiness mixed together.

...Huh, maybe I'm just thinking too much, but no guy should be feeling happy after being touched by a guy, right?

"Ho...I guess that's enough cooling. Then, here's another cup."

"Thank, thank you."

Charles received the teacup properly this time and took a gulp of tea. And after I took a sip to clear my throat, I raised the question I had been holding back.

"Why did you choose to crossdress as a guy?"

"That's because...that...tha...someone in my family, he told me to do..."

"Hm? Your family? That's the Dunois'—"

"Yes. My dad's the chairman of that company, and he ordered me to do it."

...? For some reason, I feel that something's wrong. Ever since he began, it looks obvious that Charles has some bad memories about it.

"You said he ordered...your dad? Why did he order you to do such a—"

"Ichika...well, I'm an illegitimate child."

--I have nothing to say.

I'm a 15-year-old boy who only has a normal understanding of society, and I don't even understand about what's going on around the world, and don't even know the meaning of the term 'illegitimate child'.

"I was sent back 2 years ago, about the time when my mother died. My dad's subordinates came looking and put me through many check-ups. They immediately found that my IS aptitude was extremely high, so...while it was unofficial, I was made a test pilot."

It's likely that all of these were things that Charles didn't want to mention. Even so, she still said it out, so I listened to her silently.

"I only met my dad twice, and only talked to him those two times. I usually stayed somewhere else, and was only summoned to the main house once—it was horrible. I got beaten up by the real wife and labelled 'a thief's daughter'. It was miserable...had my mother told me more, I wouldn't have been so lost."

Hahaha. Though Charles laughed softly, her voice was still dry and without emotion, and I couldn't answer to her smile. Besides, Charles probably doesn't need such an influence, right? But for some reason, I started to rage, and had to clench my fist to endure that emotion.

"After a while, the Dunois Corporation was facing a crisis."

"Huh? But the Dunois Corporation has the third largest share of mass-produced IS in the world."

"That's correct, but the Revive is still a second generation machine after all. IS development needs a lot of money, and most of the enterprises were only able to develop after getting the support of their respective

country. However, France was omitted from the European Union's 'Ignition Plan', and facing this crisis, they had to create 3rd generation frames. Though it was out of national defense concerns, for a country that doesn't have enough capital, what awaits it is doom if they don't get any benefits right from the beginning."

Speaking which, I remember what Cecilia said about 3rd generation IS development.

"Right now, the European Union's having a surge in selecting the 3rd generation Ignition Plan! Right now, the ones taking part are my country's [Blue Tears], Germany's [Schwarzer] and Italy's [Thunderstorm II]. Though England's leading right now in terms of practical usage, there's still some instability, so the country sent me into this IS Academy to obtain data."

I remember she said that. So this means that the reason why Laura transferred in was also because of that.

Back to the main point—thus, the Dunois Corporation would end up developing the 3rd generation frames, but they were already a lot slower than the other countries and was the last company selling the second generation frames. Thus, they had too little data and time, and

couldn't create much. Thus, the government naturally gave far little capital to the Dunois Corporation. Then, the situation had become one such that 'if the company fails in the next selection, the government will completely cut off funding and even revoke the rights to develop IS'.

"I can get what's going on, but what does that have to do with you having to dress up as a guy?"

"It's simple. I'm supposed to gain publicity. And also—"

Charles looks away from me and says with an anxious voice,

"If I'm a guy, it'll be easier for me to approach the current irregular case that appeared in Japan. If possible, I'm to take his IS and biometric data back. Just like that."

"In other words—"

"That's right. He called me to steal [Byakushiki]'s data. That person."

As I listened to what she said, isn't that father just using Charles? She just so happened to have high IS

aptitude, and if that's the case, make use of her—it felt like that.

And then, Charles herself should understand more of this better than I can...I see, no wonder she talked about her real father like an outsider. That's not a father, that's just a stranger—that's the way she segregated him out of her life.

"Hm, that's the case, but now that Ichika found out, I'll definitely be recalled back...as for Dunois' Corporation, mn...whether it collapses or merges with other enterprises, it shouldn't be the same as now, right? It doesn't matter to me anyway."

"..."

"Ah, I feel a lot better saying it out. Thank you for listening to me! Also, I'm sorry for lying to you. I'm sorry ."

Charles bowed to me deeply. Before I realized it, I found myself grabbing onto her shoulders and forcing her to look up.

"Is that fine with you?"

"Huh...?"

"Is that alright with you? Definitely not, right? So what about them parents, do they have the rights to take a kid's freedom away? That logic's too strange!"

"I-Ichika...?"

Charles shows a timid look of not understanding what's happening, but—ahh damn it, I can't stop talking. That's mostly because I can't even control my emotions now.

"It's logical that kids won't be born if there are no parents. But still, that doesn't mean that they can do anything with them. That's absolutely ridiculous! Everyone has the right to choose how they live, AND THAT'S NOT SOMETHING THAT EVEN PARENTS CAN INTERFERE WITH!"

As I kept talking, I seemed to notice—I see, I'm definitely not talking about Charles. I'm talking about myself, right? And then, thinking about Chifuyu-nee who's been working so hard, I had all the more reason not to endure further.

"Wha-What's wrong with you, Ichika? You seem strange..."

"Wha, ah...sorry, I just got agitated all of a sudden."

"It's alright...but what happened to you?"

"I—Chifuyu-nee and I were abandoned by our parents ."

Perhaps she understands what it means to 'be abandoned by parents', Charles lowers her head in apology.

"About that...I'm sorry."

"Don't. I only have Chifuyu-nee, and right now, I don't want to see my parents at all. Right now, the most important thing, Charles, is, what are you going to do next?"

"How...I guess it's a matter of time? If the French government learns the truth, they will revoke my rights as a representative candidate without saying a word. If I'm lucky, I'll spend some time in prison..."

"Is it okay?"

"That doesn't matter. I have no right to choose. This can't be helped."

After saying that, Charles reveals a smile that's heart-wrenching. That's an expression that far surpasses the realization of despair. I can't forgive Charles for showing such an expression, and at the same time, I'm furious that I can't do anything to help her—I'm extremely frustrated that I can't even save a friend now.

"...If that's the case, just stay here."

"What?"

"Clause number 21 of the special directive: students who are studying in this Academy will not be affiliated to any country, organisation or syndicate. Without the student's agreement, external organisations are not allowed to manage them.'"

Oh yeah, that can be used! Thinking about this, my mind calmed down, and I then recited what I memorised from the textbook with such fluency.

"—In other words, you won't be affected for 3 years as long as you stay in this school, right? If there's so much time, we can find a way to solve it. Besides, there's no need to rush."

"Ichika."

"Hm? What is it?"

"It's amazing that you could remember it. There are 55 clauses."

"...I do work hard, you know."

"Really. Hehehe."

Charles finally laughed—and that's a 15-year-old girl's laugh, devoid of any dark clouds.

(Uu, it's making me nervous for some reason...)

Looking closely, Charles' body's really nice looking, and most importantly, she has a gentle presence. Maybe it's because of this that she looked really cute to me. Right now, this defenselessness of hers is making my heart race.

"An-Anyway, the decision's still Charles'. Do what you want."

"Mn, I will."

As I'm starting to feel awkward about this, I immediately end this conversation. But should I give her a little push? Thinking about this, I again turn to look at Charles, and our eyes crossed each others.

"Hm? What's wrong?"

"Ah, it's nothing..."

I don't know if Charles understands what I'm thinking as she glances at my face. This isn't just a defenseless expression. The cleavage that's showing from below the collar is causing my heart to beat crazily.

"An-Anyway. How should I say this...Charles, please back away."

"?"

"No, that...your breasts..."

After bringing it up, Charles' cheeks blush...it felt like something similar happened a second ago.

"I-Ichika, you've been fixated at my breasts...could it be that you want to see them?"

"Wh-What?"

"..."

"..."

Charles said something that's hiding her real thoughts, causing me to panic. For some reason, she blushed and remained silent, causing an awkward atmosphere between both of us.

THOMP *THOMP*

""!!""

"Ichika-san, are you there? It seems that you haven't eaten dinner yet. Are you feeling bad?"

The sudden knocking and calling at the door made us jump up in shock.

"Ichika-san, I'm coming in."

Damn it, damn it, damn it! We're doomed this time! Once she sees Charles like this, any dimwitted fellow can tell that she's a girl.

"Wha-What do we do?"

"An-Anyway, hurry up and hide."

"I, I got it. I'll go hide then—"

"HEYY! Why the cupboard? The bed, the bed! Cover yourself in the blanket!"

"Oh, oh yeah, I forgot."

Charles and I hurriedly moved—clak, the door opened .

"Oh, oh, hi Cecilia! What's up? Is something up?"

"....What are you doing?"

Right now, the scenario is that I'm using a blanket to cover Charles' body and pressing her down from above. Anyone would probably find it weird to see someone

sprawled wide on a blanket. Cecilia's looking like she's trying to point it out anyway.

"No-Nothing, Charles seem to be sick, so I was just covering him with a blanket. Hahaha..."

"...Do Japanese have a way of curing sick people by sprawling on them?"

No, there isn't. There has never been such a thing in the world, right? Or rather, how could there be one!?

"An-Anyway, about that, Charles just said that he's not feeling well, so he wants to sleep. It doesn't seem like he wants to eat dinner either, so I just said something along the lines like I'll go alone or something like that."

"That, that's true."

A vague voice could be heard from inside the blanket. Hey, act more like a sick person, will you?

"A-Ahem."

Wahh, that feels deliberate. So I still can't fool her...?

"A-Ahh, is that so? I haven't eaten my dinner as well. Uh hm, there sure are rare coincidences in the world."

Seems like I just fooled Cecilia as she suddenly changes her attitude and changes the topic to going for dinner together. Now it seems like I need to find a way to get food back for Charles.

"Ahem, then, enjoy yourselves then."

"I, I got it."

"Dunois-san, please take care. Ichika-san, let's go then."

She links an arm with mine. As expected of an Englishwoman, doing something that a Japanese doesn't really do. To be honest, I'm really troubled that she's being so close to me, but right now, I don't want her to keep thinking about the weird stuff, so I might as well just let her crazy me out like this.

We left the room and arrived on the corridor. While walking down the staircase, we hear a shout.

"WHA-WHA-WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?"

Another person came running down fast from the other end of the corridor, and I can tell who's that without looking...it's Houki.

"Ahh, Houki-san, we're going to have dinner *together* now."

It seems like she's emphasising on the word 'together'. Is there a special meaning behind it? Maybe it's something that I don't know and the girls do, some myth or something.

"WHAT HAS THAT GOT TO DO WITH LINKING ARMS AND STICKING YOURSELF SO CLOSE TO HIM LIKE THAT!?"

"Oh? It's absolutely natural for a gentleman to escort a lady."

Is that so? I thought that I was the one being escorted... ahh, Houki's glaring at me now. Why is it my fault now?

"You too, Ichika! I was waiting at the cafeteria for you, what's going on!?"

"Even if you ask me, I had..."

I still had other things to do. Besides, you went there on your own. Isn't it too much to scold me then?

"Anyway, we're going to eat now. We'll take our leave now."

"Hol-Hold it! If that's the case, I'm coming along as well. I'm going for dinner as well."

Hm? Is that so?

"Ara ara, Houki-san, eating too much will speed up weight gain, you know?"

"Humph, don't worry about me. I will burn off those calories through my activity level."

Ohh, are you talking about the kendo club that you never show up for? The sempais will cry. There's a national-level freshman who doesn't come for practice at all. Houki, I'm really happy that you'll train me after class, but you should at least show up at the club? It's too bad if the potential you trained so much goes to waste.

"Besides, my household sent me this, so I'll be training Iai with this. There won't be any problems."

She said that as she shows us--WAH! IT'S A KATANA ! It's sheathed, but I remember it. I remember it's a famous katana that was passed down for generations ever since the Edo period--in other words, it's a real katana.

"It's name is Akeyou, crafted by the master swordsmith Akaru Giyou in his last years."

After the master swordsmith Akaru Giyou chose a swordswoman as his lifelong partner, he abandoned all the swords he made before and moved up into Hida mountain. It seemed like he created 'a sword that exists for women'.

The idea of 'women beating men' was of using soft power to beat hard power. As a swordsmith, it seemed that he was always chasing that theme. Of course, all these started from when he first met his wife. That Akaru Giyou finally came up with two conclusions.

"When swinging swords, swords should never touch other weapons. Also, a fatal blow must be dealt while the sword's close."

"One must draw the sword faster than the enemy, and the first hit must kill the enemy immediately."

Houki has the latter--which is a katana that's made to be long and thin. The sheath was made to be longer than normal, but what's unbelievable is that the drawing speed is actually faster than a dagger. I remember that one reason was because of the smoothness of the sheath and the circular motion of the body. And the other was the footing.

But is this alright? There's a high school student carrying a katana with her in this law-enforced country called Japan...oh yeah, I forgot. This is IS Academy, it's 'a land that does not belong to any country', whether in legal terms or in international.

"The-Then, let's go."

Hm, Hm? Why did Houki run to me--HUH, WAH! WHY ARE YOU EVEN HOLDING MY ARM!?

"...Houki-san, may I know what you're doing?"

"It's natural for a man to escort a lady, right?"

Escort...you two, we're just heading to the cafeteria!

Let me add on, Cecilia's holding onto my left arm, and Houki's on my right. Hey, three people in a straight line will block the corridor! Look, everyone's looking!

"Ahh, so good..."

"This is the so-called being hugged on both sides, I guess."

"What childhood friend? That's too sneaky!"

"What personal machine? That's too sneaky!"

Hm? Huh...why is everyone staring and Houki and Cecilia with such envious eyes? And it seem like these two people are doing it deliberately to earn the envious eyes of many. Is being escorted by a boy really something that's worth being envious for?

"Excuse me."

"What?"

"What is it?"

"It's really hard to walk like this."

Kii! I got pinched on both hands! What, what are you two doing? Everyone watch them!

"Don't you have anything else to say in this situation... "

"People who don't realize how happy they are are dumber than dogs."

Happiness? Well, is being pinched on both sides really considered happiness in England? Sorry, I just don't have that habit.

"Ne-Never mind. Anyway, let's go for dinner."

After I prompted them, we continued to walk, but there's another awkward situation.

"Today's fish set meal is mackerel, it should be delicious."

Squeeze over here.

"I heard that the Western set today has half-cooked egg and bacon spagetti. Want go get some, Ichika-san?"

Squeeze over there.

"Oh, oh yeah, well, about that. I think both are good."

Though I thought this way, what my mind was really thinking was: ANYTHING WILL DO! Actually, I would prefer to change the current situation now. They're holding onto my arms, and 3 people walking together will be rather obstructive. Thus, while both of them continue to walk, for every step we take, my arms are--well, how should I say it? I feel the soft ample parts of the girls, and even though I told myself not to think about it, I would still remain aware of it.

"What's wrong, Ichika?"

"Is there anything wrong, Ichika-san?"

Both of them squeezed over. They glance up at my face, and they're sticking even closer to me. While our bodies are touching each other, my arms can clearly feel their breasts being squashed underneath their clothes.

"NO, NOTHING AT ALL! NOTHING! REALLY NOTHING! DEFINITELY NOTHING!" [2C 2]

I tried to use the five perfective regular verbs to grasp tightly onto my sanity I was rapidly losing. Though it seemed like I lost a part, I don't need to mind that stuff. Speaking of which, is it used like that?

After that, I don't even remember much about what I ate, let alone the taste.

"I, I'm back..."

"Ah, Ichika, welcome back--what's wrong? You seem to swaying about."

"Oh, no, don't mind me, I'm alright. Actually, you should be pretty hungry now, right? I brought a grilled fish set meal here. You don't mind eating that, do ya?"

"Um, thanks, I'll have some then."

Charles smiled as she takes the tray, but she froze the moment she put it on the table.

"What's wrong?"

"Huh, we--ll..."

"The food will go cold if you don't eat it. Since other people specially made it for us, it would be bad if you don't eat it while it's hot."

"Ye-Yeah...well, itadakimasu."

Just as I'm laughing at Charles' insecurity, I realised the reason why she showed such an expression.

"Ah..."

PAK.

"Ah, ahh..."

Pak *Pak*.

Dropping the food again, Charles lets out a dejected voice.

She had no problems separating the fish from the bones, but for some reason, she couldn't pick it up. Speaking of which, I believe this is the first time I see Charles using a pair of chopsticks.

"Are you bad with chopsticks?"

"Um, yeah, I did try to practice using it, but I still can't get it. Ah..."

The fish dropped. There was no wastage since she dropped the food on the plate, but no matter what, she won't be able to eat if this continues.

"Sor-Sorry. I'll get a spoon for you."

"Huuh? It, it's alright. No need to take another trip, I'll find a way to use the chopsticks."

"Even if you say that, it's still difficult for you to do that, right? Didn't I tell you not to be so hesitant?"

"Bu-But..."

"Charles, you should be more dependent on others. It's because you're so courteous that you lose out."

"Uu..."

"Hm, it's probably difficult for you to change so suddenly. How about you start relying on me...maybe it's a bit besides the point, but including the family problems , I'll stand on your side, so just rely on me."

"Ichika..."

Though she hesitates for a while, it seems like she still can't eat, so she says while seemingly decided,

"Th-The-Then..."

"Okay, you just need a spoon, right?"

"Huh, well, then...Ichika, please feed me."

What's with the stuttering, sure seems like you really can't say it out--just as I thought about this, I heard an unexpected sentence, causing me to be stunned. At this moment, Charles lowers her jaw and looks up at me with a begging expression, and says,

"You said that I can rely on you..."

"That, that's right. Men keep their word. Alright, let's do this."

I seem to feel that something's amiss, but I can just ignore that for now. Charles herself finally asked a favor. If I don't grant her this request, I can't even be considered a man--let me just think of it this way.

(No, but that looking up and begging expression must be criminal...)

Her eyes were just like those of an abandoned puppy poking its head out from a cardboard box at me in the middle of a rain. Those who would reject such eyes are either brave warriors or a demon king, and I don't want to be either of them.

I received the chopsticks from Charles and picked up the bits of mackerel meat she just dropped.

"The-Then...say ahhnn."

"Ah, ahhnn--"

Never would I have dreamed of Charles letting me do an 'ahh--' action. Maybe I'm thinking too much, as Charles, who's chewing seriously, looks a bit red.

"Is, is it good?"

"Yup, yeah, it's delicious."

"Good for you then."

"Umm...I want rice next..."

"Oh, okay."

Thus, I used the chopsticks to pick up a serving of rice that a girl can mouth and used my other hand to cover the bottom to prevent it from dropping as I delivered it to Charles' mouth.

"Here, ahnn--"

"N..."

Seeing Charles eat all of that at one go, I start to feel nervous for some reason. What's going on? Is this the feeling of a hen feeding her chicks? I started to get quiet for some reason.

"Now it's the cold dish."

"I, I got it."

Anyway, even though I feed her until the end, we started to talk less and less. After finishing, both of us just said a few words before going to bed.

A lot of things really happened today. Maybe it was the physical and mental strain that caused me to fall asleep immediately the moment I snuck into my bed.

It's dark. In this heavy darkness, a person is staying there.

"..."

She didn't know when she started to become like this, but when she was born, she knew the blackness of darkness. It's said that humans will see light when

they're first born, but this girl was different. She was brought up in darkness, born amongst the shadows, and this fact hadn't changed.

In the room that was without light, her silhouette lurked in the darkness and the red eye was shining darkly.

Laura Bodewig.

She knew that this was her name, but at the same time, she didn't understand the significance behind it.

But there was one exception, that was when she was called by the instructor--only when she was called by Orimura Chifuyu that she felt that the name had a special significance, and lifted her spirits.

(That person's existence...that strength, has always been my goal, and my reason to live...)

It was like a ray of light.

When she first met Chifuyu, she was stunned by that indomitable strength. Fearful, moved and delighted, the feelings revebrated within her, making her feel hot. She then made such a wish.

Ahh, I really want to be be like--her.

I want to be like such a person.

The originally empty places within her quickly filled up, forming her *everything*.

She was her teacher and also had absolute strength. She was the complete incarnation of her ideals.

That was the only existence, to be 'like her'.

So she can't forgive those who aren't complete.

(Orimura Ichika--the person who caused the instructor to be blemished...)

She can't agree with that person's existence.

(I must eliminate him, no matter the means...)

With burning dark will, Laura silently closed her eyes and merged with the darkness as she sank into a slumber without dreams.

"I-Is that true?"

"You are not lying, are you?"

On Monday morning, as I headed towards the classroom, I got shocked by the sudden noise that could be heard on the corridor.

"What's up?"

"Who knows?"

Charles (male version) was walking beside me.

"I'm telling you it's true! This rumor is the hottest topic in school! If you're victorious in this month's division tournament, it seems like you can go out with Orimura-kun--"

"What's with me?"

""""KYAAAHHH!!!""""

What, what? I just walked in to talk to everyone normally, and they're giving me cries. Hey hey, that's too classless.

"So what are you talking about? I think I heard you people mentioning my name."

"U-Ugh? Did we?"

"Wh-Who knows what we were saying just now?"

Rin and Cecilia continued to laugh as they changed the topic. What now? Is it something that I can't know?

"No-Now then, I should return to my class."

"Th-That's right! I should return to my own seat now."

Both of them left with a somewhat fake smile. Maybe everyone else who had gathered here are trying to use this opportunity to escape and return to their classes and seats.

"...What's going on?"

"Who knows...?"

(Why, why has it become like this...)

Sitting at the table at the window, Houki's trying to act calm, but she's boiling up deep inside.

She knew of the rumor that seemed to be related to the individual division tournament.

But the problem was with the content.

"If you're victorious in this month's division tournament, it seems like you can go out with Orimura-kun--"

(That should be something only I should know!)

Ichika couldn't have spilled the beans, so who leaked the information? Recalling it, she remembered that her voice may have been too loud. Even so, she always thought that it was a secret between both of them and felt relaxed about it.

(...)

But the fact is that most of the girls already knew, and even sempais came running into the classroom with questions: 'so how about the winner is from a different grade?', 'can we hand the award out at the ceremony?'

(Things have gotten out of hand now...)

That's to be expected. She's vehemently against Ichika going out with girls other than herself, and that's to be expected. But when that happens, news will spread that she's going out with Ichika.

To be honest, Houki finds 'the secret relationship that only they know' fits her agenda, and she always had this goal.

She finds that the feeling of 'those who are normally aloof, but when alone with someone' is good.

But those feelings went amok on a 10+ year old girl who's growing up, and nobody can blame her.

Even if her tone's more traditional than normal and that others don't think that she'll do such things, Houki's wishes aren't any different from Cecilia and Rin.

(An-Anyway, I've got to win! It'll be alright once I win! It won't be like that time. It's alright, it's alright...I guess.)

Houki made the promise with Ichika when she was in fourth grade.

At that time, it was during the national kendo competition, and all the elementary school students were banded together, so 5th years and 6th years were participating as well, but in terms of the difference in experience, everyone viewed their hometown dojo's Houki as the favorite. In fact, Houki's ability was a lot stronger than the rest, so naturally, she should be able to win--logically, that should have been the case.

However, they had to move out on the day of the finals, and the one who caused her to forfeit because she couldn't attend it was her own sister, Tabane.

The IS that Tabane developed was so overwhelmingly powerful that many people felt that it could be used as a weapon. Thus, they[2C 3] could only follow the counsel of the government and move away for the sake of protection.

Ever since that day, Houki never liked Tabane. Or rather, she hated her.

After that, their family still had to move under the VIP protection plan, and it was a rush to get everywhere. They couldn't do anything about it. She once received a

letter from Ichika, but was told that 'there will be problems if a 3rd party knows where you are', so she couldn't even reply due to the pressure from the government.

Then, before she realized it, she was forced to stay apart from her parents, and the culprit behind this, Tabane was still missing. As her older sister was involved, Houki had to undergo many invigilations and investigations, and her heart and soul crumbled, unwilling to go on.

In those days, the only thing she hadn't given up was kendo, for she felt that kendo was the only thing that linked herself to Ichika. But even though she won the national championship, it didn't really satisfy her.

The reason is fast and simple. That's because kendo was 'just a way for her to blow off steam'.

--She just wanted to beat anyone down into the ground.

That's right, that was what she thought.

However, the blade is a mirror that will reflect her expression, and once that extremely ugly look of hers

heavily struck back to her, she was so mortified that she felt like she wanted to leave the prize award ceremony.

And what drew her into deeper despair was when she saw her opponent cry after losing to her in this state.

--What was I doing...

Her actions were just violence, not strength. Strength doesn't refer to this, and she knows of this...very clearly--that's what she thought.

"..."

She again shakes her head. It would be great to dump the adhesive-like memories away, but the human heart can't do such a simple thing.

(This time, I will...I should be able to win without misunderstanding the meaning of the word strength...)

No, I have to win! For myself.

Unknowingly, she started to desire getting back her old self more than Ichika.

"Ho--can't anyone change the distance..."

In the school compound where there are only 3 toilets for guys (i.e. me) to use, I immediately dashed out once the bell rang. Of course, I had to sprint at full speed in order to catch up to class. But I got mercilessly scolded a few days ago 'don't run on the corridor'. What else can I do but to run!?

(But thinking about it, Charles was the most worst off...)

She's a girl but she has to go to a guy's toilet. In other words--

(Nope, don't think about it. It's better not to.)

Anyway, I have no time to dilly-dally. The next lesson will be about basic IS battle technical knowledge and response. To me, that's something that I have to attend no matter what.

"WHY ARE YOU A TEACHER HERE!?"

"What a headache..."

Hm? I seem to hear a voice down the corner, and I try to notice. Those are voices I'm familiar with. One of them is Laura, the other should be Chifuyu-nee's.

"Don't let me repeat this again. I have my duties to perform, that's all."

"What kind of duties can you possibly have in this small far-east country!?"

I guess there's nothing else that can cause the ice-like transfer student Laura Bodewig to be so agitated. From what they're saying, Laura seems to be expressing her discontent about Chifuyu-nee's current job and her idol worship like emotions of Chifuyu-nee.

"Please instructor. Please come back to Germany to guide us. You can't even show off half your abilities here."

"Oh?"

"Basically, the students over here aren't worth teaching."

"Why?"

"They aren't prepared enough. They have too little sense of danger, they think that IS is a trendy thing, those low-class people aren't worth the time for instructor to te --"

"--End of the line, little lady."

"Ugh...!"

Chifuyu-nee's voice has a terrifying presence, and even Laura seems to be afraid of the huge intent hidden in the voice as she stops, unable to continue.

"To think that you believe you're rather good after we haven't met in a while, is it? Just 15 years old, and you think that you're superior to others. I'm impressed."

"I, I'm..."

Even I can hear the trembling in her voice. She probably felt terrified, I suppose? Feeling fear from the overwhelming force in front of her, and feeling irritated that it can't be helped.

"Alright, it's time for lessons. Get back to the class."

"..."

With Chifuyu-nee's voice reverting back to normal, Laura silently leaves quickly...ah, man!

"Are you eavesdropping, the boy over there? I can't allow that abnormal fetish."

"WHO, WHO HAS SUCH A WEIRD FETISH! CHIFUYU-NEE, YOU--!"

PAM!

"In school, call me Orimura-sensei."

"Ye-Yes..."

Just like that, I couldn't even lift my head in front of Chifuyu-nee, as I got knocked on the head before I could even do so. We're not playing whack-a-mole here...

"Alright, hurry up and move along, you low-grade student. If this keeps up, you'll be eliminated on the 1st round of the individual tournament. Don't forget to work hard."

"I get it..."

"Is that so? That's good."

Chifuyu-nee smiles. It seems like she just said that as an older sister.

"I'm going back to class then."

"Mn, then move fast. Oh yes, Orimura."

"What is it?"

"Don't run on the corridors...I won't say that. If you want to run, make sure no one finds out."

"Got it."

I turned my back at Chifuyu-nee. It seems like she's letting me off the hook this time.

I cautiously sprinted back to the classroom without anyone noticing.

""Ah.""

Both of them let out dumbfounded voices--the time's after school, the place is at the 3rd arena, and the people involved are Rin and Cecilia.

"What a coincidence, I'm about to do some special training for the divisional tournament in order to win."

"What a coincidence. I'm thinking the same thing."

Invisible sparks fly between them. It seems like both of them want to win.

"Now's a good opportunity to decide here, once and for all, who's better."

"Ara, it's rare for us to have a common agreement. Now we can use this chance to see who's stronger, and at the same time, who's more elegant."

Both of them summoned their main wapons and aimed them at each other.

"Then--"

At that moment, a supersonic cannon blast came from above, blocking out their voices.

""!!""

After doing emergency evasions, Rin and Cecilia looked up at where the beam was shot from, only to see a pitch black machine standing over there.

The machine name was [Schwarzer Regen], and the registered pilot was--

"Laura Bodewig..."

Cecilia looks unhappy as she braced herself, one reason being that another European Union competitor was here.

"...What are you doing? Firing a shot over here, that's really amazing."

DONG! Rin raises the attached [Souten Gagetsu] up onto her shoulder and moved her [Impact Cannons] into standby mode.

"China's [Shenlong] and England's [Blue Tears] ... humph, I actually felt that they were only stronger on the data."

Hearing the sudden taunt, Rin and Cecilia scowled.

"What's the matter? You really like to fight, don't you? Coming all the way here from Germany just to get beaten . You must love being bullied. Is this really something trendy in the potato fields?"

"Ara ara Rin-san, that Missy doesn't seem to have much vocabulary, so don't bully her too much or it'll really seem pathetic. Even a dog can whimper."

Laura's sharp glare of arrogance seemed to offend those two. Even so, they still tried to vent their anger with words.

But unfortunately, that was futile.

"Sigh...so they let two people who're so weak that they would lose to a mass-produced machine be personal IS pilots? It seems like they really lack talent despite the numbers--your weak countries that can only be redeemed by your history."

BOOM--!

With the sound of something being cut off, Rin and Cecilia remove the final safety on their equipment.

"Yeah, yeah, I got it, I got it! She wants to be trashed--Cecilia, let's decide who should go first with janken[2C 4]!
"

"Mn, well, I don't really care whether I go first or last--
"

"Ha! Then how about both of you go at me? 1 + 1 equals 2 anyway. How can I lose to women who seem to be fighting over a useless stallion?"

These words were obviously taunts, but having went past their patience, both of them didn't care anymore.

"--What did you just say? My ears just heard 'Please, punch me as much as you like'."

"Insulting people who aren't here, I'm really ashamed of you as a fellow European Union candidate. Let me beat you up until that frivolous mouth of yours is shut for good."

Both of them tightly gripped onto their weapons, and Laura coldly stared at them before opening her arms out slightly and flipping her fingers[2C 5].

"Come at me already."

""AS YOU WISH!!!""

"Ichika, are you going for special training today?"

"Well, yeah, I remember the only arena that can be used is--"

"The 3rd arena."

""WAH!""

Charles and I walked down the corridor side by side, only to hear an unexpected voice, causing us to jump up in shock.

Maybe she was unhappy with our united response, but the 3rd person who was standing beside us from who knows when, Houki frowns.

"...Is there a need to be shocked. That's rude."

"Ah, oh, I'm sorry."

"Sorry, I got shocked. It was too sudden."

"Ah, no, I'm not blaming you..."

Seeing Charles bow down properly, even Houki's momentum got cut by half. And then, seemingly feeling like she lost face, Houki deliberately coughed a few times to change the topic.

"Anyway, let's head to the 3rd arena. I heard that there will be very few people using it today, so if there's time, I should be able to carry out some mock battles."

That's really's great. Since the IS ability is proportionate to the actual operation time, it's great even if it's just a little time. I'm really grateful to have some training like a mock battle.

As we headed towards the arena, we found a lot of tension over there, and there were a lot of students running around in the corridor. It seems like the commotion happened at the 3rd arena.

"What's wrong?"

"What's going on? Should we check it out?"

Charles said as she pointed at the gate to the spectator stands. It's better to go there than to go through the ordinary gate, so I nodded my head in agreement.

"It seems like there're people having a mock battle, but the situation seems to be--"

DONG--VROOM!

Just as both of us turn to look at the sudden explosion, two shadows flew out of the smoke like they were cutting through it.

"RIN! CECILIA!"

Under the isolation of the protective shields, the explosions on the stage itself didn't spread to us, but at the same time, I couldn't hear them.

Both of them looked hurt as they gazed directly at the center of the explosion, and standing over there was Laura, who was piloting the pitched-black IS [Schwarzer Regen].

Looking closely, Rin and Cecilia's ISs were severely damaged. There were damage marks all over the frame, and a part of the IS armor was completely broken. In

contrast, Laura's IS wasn't completely unscathed, but the damage was relatively light compared to them.

"WHAT ARE YOU TWO DOING--HEY, HEY!"

My voice couldn't reach them from here, and it couldn't be helped. After looking at Rin and Cecilia, I turned to look at Laura. Though it was a 2 vs 1, the ones in trouble were Rin and Cecilia, who, logically, should have been in an advantageous situation.

"EAT THIS!"

KLANG! Rin's IS [Shenlong] opened its shoulders. Docked on them were the pressurized-air impact cannons [Ryuhow], the maximum output weapons of the [Shenlong]. If it were a training machine, one shot would definitely wreck it, but Laura wasn't avoiding at all.

"That's useless against the absolute barrier of the [Schwarzer Regen]."

The invisible shots of the impact cannons were aimed at Laura, but no matter how I looked at it, the attacks never landed on her.

"Che! To think that you can hold me off like that..."

Maybe she deployed some protective shield or something like that, but Laura only reached her right hand out, and the impact cannons were completely nullified while they impact.

She shot out blades from her shoulders at Rin's IS. As they were both linked to the main body by electronic cables, she was able to let them fly out in complicated paths to avoid the direct shots and thus grabbed Rin's right foot--they seemed to be weapons that were a mix between blades and cables.

"Do you think I'll let you do as you please so many times!?"

Covering Rin, Cecilia attacked and launched her BITs at Laura.

"Ho...I don't know if [Blue Tears] is said to have the highest mobility in theory, but treating that design as a 3rd generation frame? That's a joke."

Cecilia used accurate sniping and the BITs to launch attacks from all over the place, and Laura continued to dodge and extend her arm out like just before. This time, she seemed to grab something in front of her while she

was folding her arms, and the moment she did that, the BITs stopped.

"Your movements are sealed!"

"Yours too."

Though Cecilia managed to snipe her target accurately , Laura shot her large cannon to completely negate it. Laura threw Rin, who she caught just now, at Cecilia, who intended to continue firing. It was a theory of using cables to swing down in a clockwork manner, simple, yet effective.

"Ah!"

Facing the two of them while they lost their balance in mid-air, Laura launched her attack. Her speed could be compared to a bullet as she closed in within a second.

"[Ignition Boost]--!"

I definitely didn't see it wrong. That's my move, a special technique for close-range.

But if this is a close combat battle, it was beneficial for Rin as well. At this moment, she could also use her [

Souten Gagetsu] to counter. Just as I was thinking that, I was shocked to see Rin undoing the knot.

However, I immediately understood the reason why she did that. Laura deployed the plasma blades from her sleeve and hacked at Rin with them.

"You...!"

While Laura was moving forward, Rin backed away and increased the distance, dodging a few blows in the process, skillfully using the shape of the arena to move and forcing herself not to get into any dead ends. However, Laura's cable blades attacked again, the two on her shoulders and the ones on both sides of her waist, 6 of them altogether. They all attacked in 3 dimensions as she continued to use her plasma blades to attack viciously. Even if it was Rin, who was so used to fighting , it was too difficult for her to deal with all the attacks adequately.

"Heh!"

Rin again deployed the impact cannons and gathered the power there.

"How naive! Using pressurized-air weapons that need time in this situation?"

As Laura said this, her cannons destroyed the impact cannons before shooting.

"Got you!"

"!"

As the armor on her back got shot off, Rin's body lost balance and Laura used this chance to stab the plasma blade at her chest.

"I WON'T LET YOU!"

At the last moment, Cecilia rushed in between Rin and Laura and used the [Starlight Mk II] as a shield. After avoiding the sure-kill attack, she shot the missile type BITs on her waist at Laura.

BOOMM!!!!

That was almost the equivalent of a suicidal close-ranged rocket as the explosion caught Rin and Cecilia, causing them to tumble on the floor.

"That was reckless of you..."

"Save the complaints for later. But really, that should have done some damage--"

Cecilia stopped as she spoke.

As the smoke scattered, standing over there was Laura . Even though it was an explosion at close range, she was still floating in mid-air without a scratch.

"Is it over? Well then--it's my turn."

The moment she said that, she used the [Ignition Boost] to glide down to the ground, first kicking Rin and then shooting Cecilia with a cannon.

Then, Laura used the cabled blades to grab their bodies and drag them to her. After that, one-sided violence ensued.

"AHHHH!!"

Laura's fists clamped down hard on their arms, legs and bodies, causing their defenses to drop lower than what the machine maintanence warning zone permited. If the damage kept up, the ISs would be forcefully removed! It will be critical danger to their lives!

But Laura didn't stop as she continued to beat and kick Rin and Cecilia, ripping their ISs armor apart.

Seeing Laura's usual emotionless face actually smile for a moment due to delight, something seems to explode in me.

"OOOOOOHHHHH!!"

I deployed [Byakushiki] and formed the [Yukihira Niigata], gathering all the power together to activate the [Reiraku Byakuya]. An energy sword that was several times bigger than the main body was released as I used it to hack the protective layer surrounding the arena.

[Reiraku Byakuya], which can destroy anything that uses energy, hacked through the protective shield, and I slipped through the gap to charge in.

While entering, I activated [Ignition Boost]. Logically, it would be suicidal to use this move along with [Reiraku Byakuya]'s maximum output, as it would cause much more stress on [Byakushiki] which already uses a lot of energy and drains a lot out of the shields, but I'm not in the mood to bother about that.

"LET GO OF THEM, YOU!"

I charged at Laura, who was grabbing onto Rin and Cecilia, and swung my sword down.

"Humph...emotional and reckless, just like a fool."

Just when Reiraku Byakuya's energy blade was about to hit her, my body suddenly stopped. The right eye of Laura that was not covered with an eyepatch accurately grasped my movement from my body.

"Wh-What's going on? Damn it, my body...!"

It felt like I got held down by an invisible hand as my body couldn't move and my arms are held high, unable to land. [Reiraku Byakuya]'s power started to disappear bit by bit.

"As expected, you're not worthy of being my opponent . In front of this [Schwarzer Regen] of mine, you're just another weakling like them--disappear."

The huge cannon on her shoulder turned over, and with a clank, it's aimed at me--damn it!

"MOVE ASIDE, ICHIKA!"

Charles shouted through the private communicator as she uses two assault rifles to rain down bullets.

"Che...another small fry..."

The invisible force that's grabbing onto me disappeared as my body regained its freedom. I then flew to Rin and Cecilia, who were released by Laura and carried them away.

(Please [Byakushiki]! Let me use another [Ignition Boost]!)

Due to the bad habit of running out of energy after putting it at the maximum output, I had very little energy left. But [Byakushiki] seemed to grant my wish as it focused all the power on the huge thrusters behind me--good!

Klang...for a moment, the world became some sort of slow-motion picture before accelerating fast at the next moment. After experiencing the unique feeling of [Ignition Boost], I immediately got away from Laura.

"How are the two of them, Ichika?"

Charles was covering me as she followed me from behind, asking me as she continued to shoot at Laura. She was using a super-high explosive assault rifle, and since she was reloading fast, the gun would be reloaded immediately after the bullets were used up, so Laura didn't have any chance to counter.

"Ugh...Ichika..."

"I let you...see me get embarrassed out there..."

"Don't talk...Charles, there's no problem. They're still conscious."

"Good."

Charles responded with a somewhat relaxed tone, but she didn't stop as she kept shooting at Laura after doing a third reload.

"Interesting, let me show you the difference in power across different IS generations!"

Laura dodged the bullets, or rather, defended against them, even using that invisible forcefield to stop the bullets. She then bent down to counter--probably to do [

Ignition Boost]. I was still carrying Rin and Cecilia, so I couldn't fight in this situation, but I knew that it would be dangerous for Charles to handle this alone!

"Here I come...!"

"Kuu!"

Just as Laura was about to rush in, a figure jumped in between us.

CLANG!

As the sound of metal could be heard, that figure stopped Laura's Ignition Boost.

"...My my, it's because of little things like this that I grew tired of handling kids."

"Chifuyu-nee?"

To think that the figure belonged to an unexpected person, and she was still wearing a normal suit. There were ISs here, and she wasn't even wearing an IS suit. She was holding onto a IS sword easily, and that was a huge sword that was 170cm in length, all without the use of an IS. Besides, she just interrupted the battle from the

side. No matter how I feel, she's definitely not an ordinary human.

"It's fine to have mock battles--but, to the extent of destroying the barriers of the arena? As a teacher, I can't stand by that. You can finish this battle at the individual division tournament."

"Since instructor says so..."

Laura nodded in obedience and got rid of her IS. Her armor scattered into particles of light and disappeared.

"Orimura, Dunois, is that fine with you two?"

"Ah, yeah..."

I just accidentally answered as per normal, probably stunned by this sudden scenario.

"Answer yes when you're replying to a teacher, you moron."

"Ye-Yes."

"I'm fine with that as well."

After I corrected my answer, Charles agreed too. Hearing her say that, Chifuyu-nee again addressed everyone in the arena.

"In that case, until the individual division tournament, all personal battles are forbidden. Dismissed!"

PA! Chifuyu-nee forcefully clapped her hands, and it sounded as loud as a bullet being shot.

"..."

"..."

We're now in the infirmary, and it's been an hour since what happened at the 3rd arena. Rin and Cecilia have completed their treatment, and now that they're bandaged, they're staring away in different directions.

"It would have be alright even if you hadn't saved us."

"We could have won if it had continued."

Forget about thanking me, I even got such an answer. Oh well, it's not like I interfered just to earn their thanks. Basically, I interfered due to my own anger.

"You two..well, at least you two don't look too injured. I can relax now."

"These injuries are nothing--OWW!!"

"It's really meaningless to lie down here--EEKKK!!"

...Are these two idiots?

"WHO ARE YOU CALLING AN IDIOT! YOU MORON!"

"YOU'RE A BIG IDIOT, ICHIKA-SAN!"

And the response was so intense. I didn't even say anything and they found out? Either way, I really don't know what to do with these two injured people who're enraged.

"It must be quite embarrassing for you two to show such an awkward side to the person you like."

"Huh?"

Charles bought the drinks and came back. She seemed to say something, but I didn't listen to it carefully.

But it just seemed like I'm the only one, as Rin and Cecilia just blushed and started to rampage after hearing something.

"W-WH-WHA-WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? I DON'T UNDERSTAND AT ALL!!"

"I-I-I WASN'T TRYING TOO HARD! IT'S UNCOMFORTABLE HEARING YOU MAKE GUESSES LIKE THIS!"

Both of them continued to get flustered as their faces turned extremely red...what's wrong? Did Charles say something?

"Here, Oolong tea and red tea. Drink something to calm down, okay?"

"H-Humph!"

"I'll accept it reluctantly then!"

Rin and Cecilia snatched the drinks Charles served up and opened the bottles, gulping them down in one go. Hey hey, you'll damage your bodies if you drink such icy stuff in one shot!

"Well, sensei did say that you two can go back after calming down, so rest for a while--"

DON *DON* *DON* *DON* *DONG...!*

"Wh-What? What is that sound?"

The quake-like sound came from the corridor, and it seemed to be getting close, or maybe that's just my imagination.

BAM! The infirmary door got sent flying...and no, I'm not kidding. It got sent flying, really! This is the first time I saw the door get sent flying like that. I thought this could only happen in the movies.

"Orimura-kun!"

"Dunois-kun!"

Entering the room were--several girls who came in like an avalache, and this is something really big. As the

infirmary only has 5 beds, it's packed full with people in an instant, and they surrounded us on sight, reached their hands out like some mega-sales...wah, this is just like a horror movie. Anyone would be terrified by the numerous hands.

"Wh-Wha-What's up?"

"Wha-What's going on? Everyone...pl-please calm down."

""""This!""""

Facing us while we're still confused, the girls handed over the emergency news and registration form.

"Wha-What...?"

"'In order to make the battles more realistic, the individual division tournament this month will be done in pairs. Henceforth, all those without pairs will have a partner selected for them in the lottery. The deadline is'..."

"Ah, anyway, just read this part! Here!"

Another hand reached out. Hiiee.

"Pair up with me, Orimura-kun!"

"Dunois-kun, be partners with me!"

I don't know why there's a sudden change in format of the individual division tournament, but anyway, all the people who came here right now are all first years (I can tell from the color of the ribbon). They probably came running here thinking that they can get the opportunity to pair up with the only 2 guys in school, but--

"Huh, well..."

That's right, Charles' actually a girl, so it will be bad no matter who she pairs up with. As the pairs will have to train together, her real identity may be exposed.

So I thought as I looked at Charles, who was staring back at me with a bothered look. After our eyes met, it seemed like she knew I understood her plea for help as she looked away.

Charles' cautiousness caused me to grimace as I declared in a voice loud enough for all the girls who were bickering to hear,

"I'm sorry everyone, but I'm pairing up with Charles. Please give up!"

Utter silence...the sudden silence caused me to back away somewhat. Ugh, so this idea can't work?

"Well, can't be helped if that's the case..."

"It's better than teaming up with other girls..."

"A picture of two guys together is more beautiful... ahem."

It seem like they accepted it, and as the girls continue to say that it can't be helped, they leave the infirmary one by one. Trying to look for the door, I can still hear a commotion on the corridor.

"Hoo..."

"Well, about that, Ichika--"

"Ichika!"

"Ichika!"

Charles started to speak as I finally heave a sigh of relief, but Rin and Cecilia jumped off the bed and overpowered her with shocking pressure.

"Pa-Pair up with me! Aren't we childhood friends?"

"No, I'm your classmate!"

Both of them seem like they're about to strangle my neck. Hey, injured people should rest in bed, or else the injuries will get worse.

But what should I do? They're not like the girls from before, and it seem like I can't shake them off easily...haa.

"You shouldn't."

Wha? It seem like I'm not the only one who's shocked by this sudden voice, as Rin and Cecilia blinked, stunned by Yamada-sensei's sudden arrival.

"I just confirmed the state of both your ISs. The damage level sustained by both of your ISes have exceeded phase C. If you don't focus on recovering, there will be fatal problems later on. Take it as rest for your ISs, I won't allow you two to participate."

Can the two representative candidates with burning will accept this? I guess not...

"Ugh, ku...! I-I got it."

"I'm not willing...not, not at all! But I'll withdraw from the tournament..."

What? They actually accepted it...why?

"Sensei's happy that you can accept it. If you use the IS past the limits, you have to pay the price. It'll be bad if you lose the chance at the opportune time, and sensei doesn't wish for you two to become like that."

"Yes..."

"I got it..."

Though both of them look like they can't accept Yamada-sensei's serious lecture, at least they recognize that they can't participate in the tournament.

"Ichika, what's the third point of gaining experience in IS basic theory?"

Huh, huh...

"...'The IS will gather all the experiences from the battles and cause to it evolve faster. As experience gained is also done while the IS is damaged, if the IS is damaged past phase C, the incomplete state will cause a surge in energy, which will be bad for normal operations.'"

"Ohh, that's right! As expected of Charles!"

Charles gave the explanation that I couldn't remember.

In other words, it's like 'there will be muscle aches when one tries to move during a fracture', and that should be right.

Anyway, back on topic, I asked Rin and Cecilia what I wanted to ask,

"So why did you two fight against Laura?"

"What, nothing, that's because..."

"Eh, well, how should I explain this...because we females got our pride hurt."

"Hm?"

Why is it that both of them look like they can't swallow it? I suppose one side started battle after a taunt, but as representative candidates of different countries, isn't it bad to act after a taunt? Hm.

"Ah, don't tell me it's about Ichika--"

"Ahh! You're being a loudmouth, Dunois!"

"Tha-That's right! Really! Ahhahaha!"

Charles seemed to finally thought of something, but those two girls quickly stopped her from saying it. Charles' mouth is cupped by those two as she struggles painfully.

"Hey hey, stop it. Can't you tell that Charles' really sad now? You're wounded here, and yet you were moving non-stop since just now...hey!"

Trying to calm them down, I reach my hands out to grab Rin and Cecilia on the shoulders.

"EEEKKK!!!"

As expected, it's painful. I just saw them shriek out and freeze.

"..."

"..."

"Ah...sorry, I didn't expect it to be that painful."

Seeing them remain silent as tears well up in their eyes , I can roughly understood how painful it is. I feel that I overdid it and immediately apologized

"I-I-Ichika...you..."

"Yo-You...you better remember this..."

Wah...they'll punch me once they recover, I guess? And then they'll demand set after set of set meals, and maybe even dessert. Drinks? That would be unlimited.

"Th-Then, about that, Ichika."

"Wha?"

After dinner, as we headed back to the room, Charles finally spoke. Maybe it's just me, but she sounded really forceful. What's going on?

"Well, it may be a little late, but...thank you for helping me."

"Hm? What did I do? I feel that you helped me out at the arena."

"It's not that, I'm talking about what happened at the infirmary. You said that you would be my partner for the tournament. I'm really grateful about that."

"Ah, about that? Hn, no need to worry. I'm the only one who knows the truth, so it's right for me to support you, right?"

I didn't really think that it was somewhat special, but Charles didn't seem to think this way as she thanked me with much enthusiasm.

"That's not it. It's because you're so kind, Ichika, that you naturally did that. I always felt that it's great to stand up for others. Thank you."

...Hm, as expected of a blond royal prince, even the wording used is really elegant, causing me to feel somewhat embarrassed. I used my hand to slap my face and fan it.

"Th-That's right, well, Charles, you don't have to deliberately use such a boyish-tone to talk to me when I'm around."

"Hn, hn, well I-I do think this way, but before I came here I had to study a boy's movements and speaking habits in order to 'avoid showing my real identity', so it may be impossible for me to change it back."

The one who taught her all these would be Charles' father, who I've never met. Though I'm really angry about this, seeing her just mention this nonchalantly, I can only endure--who am I angry for? For myself? I can't mistake this now.

"Bu-But that's...not really like a girl, is it?"

Looking dejected, Charles looked around as she asked me timidly.

"Hm? Are you talking about how you keep using ' boku'[2C 6]?"

"That, that's right. It's not what a girl would say, so I'll try my best to use an ordinary method to speak while we're alone."

"Ah, there's no need to try so hard, right? You're rather feminine anyway. I think Charles' rather cute already anyway."

"Cu-Cute...? Me? Re-Really? You're not lying to me?"

What's going on? Charles seemed to be even more panicked than before as she continued to ask me, but I didn't intend to lie to her as I answer honestly.

"I'm not lying. Trust me."

"Re-Rea...Really--that's alright, I guess."

Though I didn't really know what was going on, it seemed like she felt that it was alright. She just gave a reply and nodded her head.

"Oh yeah, a lot of things happened today. Let's change then."

Hearing her say this, I suddenly realized--Charles' a girl, so it couldn't be helped that she had to wear the IS suit inside the changing room, but when we were in our room, she had all the time and space to do whatever she wanted. I should wait outside for her to finish changing.

"I'm going out then."

"Huh? Why?"

"Well, you can't change when I'm around, right? It would be hard to remove the IS suit, so I'll leave the room for now."

Speaking of which, I remember that the same thing happened while I was with Houki. I'm still rather uneasy when I'm living with girls, and things are a lot more complicated with Charles acting like a guy.

"Huh? It's fine. I feel bad for Ichika. Well...I don't really feel bothered..."

"But even if you say that, I'm bothered by that myself...
"

"Bu-But...well, since we're both guys, people might think it's weird if one of us were to go outside, right?"

"Well, that's true...well, I'll go to the sink then. Call me when you're done."

"I, I said that you don't have to mind me. We, can change like normal, and Ichika, you have to change anyway, right?"

Hm...anyway, it seems like I don't have to go out of the room. I don't know why Charles' trying so hard to make me stay here, but since she said so, I can't just leave it as it is.

"I'll change as well then."

"Okay, let's do that."

Charles smiled. Her face must be getting somewhat hot as it's flushed to a certain extent, probably because she was working so hard to find an excuse.

"Okay, it's about time to wear short-sleeved clothes. H-uh, where's my change of clothes...ah, found it found it."

"..."

"Hm? What's wrong?"

Though Charles had just told me that I didn't have to go out outside, she wasn't changing at all, so I stared at her in a puzzled manner.

"Wha, Ichika, I can't change if you continue to stare at me like that..."

"Th-That, that's right, sorry."

I turned around. Why do I find this familiar? It was the same feeling when I was with Houki--

"I, I'll be changing then..."

"O-Okay."

I was thinking, and after I heard her call, I curled up in shock. After a few seconds of silence...I started to hear the sound of clothes being taken off.

(Ugh, not good...that's a sweet smell over there...)

Though I felt nothing when she was a guy, ever since I knew that Charles was a girl, I could feel a seductive gentle aroma as long as I remained in the same room.

That's right, it's the aroma a girl has.

(What is this...guys don't have this smell at all. Is it the so-called pheromones?)

"I-Ichika, aren't you changing?"

"O-Oh, oh yeah, I'm changing now."

Hearing her say that, I suddenly realized that I was spacing out. Anyway, better get up from the bed and begin taking off my clothes.

"..."

Stare--

Is it my imagination? For some reason, I feel that someone's staring at me from behind.

"Charles?"

"Wah! Wh-What's wrong?"

Hearing her being extremely shocked, I started to feel shocked. As it seemed like I was getting panicky while looking for something to say, it became a problem when I couldn't even think of what to ask.

"I'll apologize first if it's just a mistake, but are you staring at me?"

"No, of course not!"

"I, I see."

She vehemently denied it. Maybe it's just me being too self-aware. I'm a guy and yet I'm so mindful of others looking at me. Why am I so vain?

(Never mind, let's just hurry up and change.)

"..."

Stare--

...Well--Charles-san?

"No peeping."

"Ah? I-I'm not, I was--ah!"

Charles' awkward voice became a soft whimper, and I instinctively turn around to look at her.

"Oww...I tripped...huh?"

"Huh?"

""WHAAT!!!""

Charles got tripped by the pants and fell onto the floor. The problem was her posture; she was wearing the tight bra she would normally wear while she's in guy's clothings, and at the bottom, besides the pants that are pulled down to the knees, there are the panties--and girls ones at that (although that's obvious). As Charles lost her balance and fell onto the floor, her hands and legs were on the floor and her butt was slightly lifted up. That perfectly-shaped butt and the pink panties that were slightly curled in were really alluring--not good, not good at all! At least for me anyway.

"WAH--"

Damn it! It's bad for us both if there's a girl's cry in here!

I thought as I jump onto Charles, who was taking off her pants and stuffed her mouth up.

In fact, Charles got shocked by my sudden action and stopped screaming, but as my body was in mid-air, the scream stopped for a while, and then I continued and landed on Charles.

But that wasn't all. When it rains, it pours. While I'm in mid-air, the pants caught onto the bed and tangled me up, and I then lost speed like an object being thrown and crash onto the floor.

--And a second before I crash onto the floor, I instinctively reached out my hands, and they firmly grabbed onto something I shouldn't be grabbing.

"Ugh~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~"

The force bounced back on me, and the firm muscles, silky smooth skin and the intricate fabric...in other words , that means I'm grabbing onto Charles' butt.

My first thoughts were that it's soft and warm--ah, that's right, I can understand why people who are dying would be extremely calm. That's because they would think about everything.

Also, gravity won't forgive anyone. My body dropped down. In other words, Charles' underwear would also slide down--

"AHHHHH!!!"

MOVE!!!

On the floor, Charles' instincts told her to use her leg to kick, and it landed perfectly on my jaw. Just like that, I got a concussion and fainted--KU!

"..."

Charles put the unconscious Ichika on the bed and blushed as she changed into her nightwear.

She was looking angry, embarrassed and somewhat happy, and it was rather complicated and weird.

"Re-Really, Ichika's always looked like this, and yet he's..."

Though she knows that Ichika didn't do it on purpose, Charles still can't hold back her emotions.

That was just an accident. It was nothing much, but she still felt angry treating it as a simple coincidence.

"A-Actually, I wouldn't..."[2C 7]

Saying up to that, Charles finally recovered, and after noticing what she was about to say, her cheeks blushed again. She looked like she wanted to shake off the redness on her face as she shook her head forcefully.

(Ah, whatever, I'm going to sleep! Yes! That's good!)

Looking away from Ichika, Charles turned off the lights in the room. As the room immediately became dark, her eyes couldn't adjust immediately.

And maybe because she couldn't see Ichika's face, Charles became unexpectedly daring.

(W-What am I doing...)

Charles thought as she closed in on Ichika's face and stared at him. Both of them are less than 5cm away from each other.

Charles could feel the breathing and even the body temperature of Ichika, and that caused her heart to pound faster.

"..."

Then, she remembered what Ichika said to her with a serious expression earlier.

"...If that's the case, just stay here."

--That was the first time someone said that to her.

Ever since her mother died, she had lost her only place of refuge. As her blood-related father only gave her a stifling ice chamber feeling, she could only pretend to live in the light.

She no longer felt that she was wanted, continuing to live through the grey cold life.

When the order her father gave her to go to Japan was finalized, she had no special emotions about it.

However--

(Why did Ichika cause my heart to waver?)

--She met the boy.

Sometimes, it felt like she got involved in a storm, but as she thought of that, he felt like a shamrock that blooms in spring and appeared beside her. However, when she tried to reach her hand out to get close, he would escape like a squirrel in a forest. Thus, she could only look in through the gaps between the trees, unable to close in.

"He's really sneaky, that Ichika."

He's just in front of her now, but he can't wake up, just like a 'sleeping beauty'. Thinking about this, Charles suddenly felt weird.

(Hoho, so the roles are reversed now.)

Charles again stared at Ichika for a while and showed a gentle look. Then, she kissed Ichika gently on the forehead like a mother kissing a child.

"Good night, Ichika..."

Charles hugged her body that continued to burn hot through the rest of the night.

Chapter 4: Find Out my Mind

It's now the last week of June. IS Academy had already gotten into the individual division tournament mode, and the panic far exceeded what was expected. It was about time for the 1st round, and all the students were still settling the admin matters, clearing the arenas and guiding the guests in.

The students who finally gained their freedom frantically headed into the changing rooms in each block, and the boys' changing room is still so large, and still occupied by 2 people. It's really generous for them, but the other changing room has to accommodate twice the capacity of the room, so the situation's rather serious.

"But this is really shocking..."

I looked at the state of things from the changing room's television screen. Government officials from all over the world, researchers, enterprise representatives and other people were all gathered here.

"There will be people scouting the third years and others checking the progress of the second years after their training. Though the first years shouldn't be

affected, I guess they will be noticed if they get the top few positions in the tournament."

"Hm--that's hard work."

Though I just listened to something that I wasn't really interested in, Charles seemed to notice what I was thinking as she chuckled.

"Ichika, you just want to fight against Bodewig, right?"

"Well, that's right."

As expected, Rin and Cecilia weren't allowed to participate, so they had to forfeit. It would have been alright if they were ordinary students, but they're representatives of other countries, and have their own personal machine. They couldn't even take part in the tournament, let alone getting a good result. This would drastically affect their circumstances.

"It must be hard for them to be unable to test themselves."

I remembered the commotion from before and unconsciously gripped my left hand. Maybe I'm being too forceful, as Charles gently covers my hand with hers and soothes it.

"Don't be frustrated. I guess she's most likely the strongest among all the first years."

"Yeah, I know."

Ever since it was decided to be a double battle, and since we were living in the same room, Charles and I had gotten a lot closer. Normally, Charles would start to sense my feelings or detect things really quickly. But nowadays, I seemed to understand what she was thinking. Maybe this was telepathy. It's become normal to start action without saying anything first. It's practically as common as having meals...not just meals, but the basic three meals.

"--Ichika, this isn't funny."

"Uu...really?"

Though one couldn't really tell from her appearance, Charles had a vicious tongue when it came to criticizing

jokes. But why is it that she's become able to tell what I'm thinking like the rest of them? That's a mystery.

"Alright, I'm ready."

"Same here."

We've finished changing into our IS suits. While I was making sure to check one last time before activating my IS, Charles seemed like she was checking her male IS suit (at least the outline was made like it).

"The schedule should be out."

I don't know the reason, but it seems like the double battle format seem to cause the system to be unable to function as per normal. Thus, the schedule which was supposed to be finished yesterday was only done by students today using a lottery.

"Those in the first round who get the first group in block A are really lucky."

"Hm? Why?"

"Because we won't be standing around thinking. This momentum is important. Problems can be settled once they come, it's better to enter the finals decisively."

"Hoho, maybe. For me, I'm thinking that if I show my ability right from the start, my thoughts will start to get more negative."

It's really just like what Charles would be like. Maybe it was because both of us seemed to have such contrasting ideas that we would agree with each other. But I did feel that Charles was just going along with me.

I recalled the scene when both of us were training--Charles has a nice personality and is extremely gentle. I don't seem to have any of such people around. Though it may be an exaggeration, she does look like a goddess or an angel to me, and that can't be helped. I'm serious! That can't be helped!

"Ah, it seems like we have our opponents."

I switched the screen to the schedule and paused my thoughts, looking intently at the words on the screen.

""--WHAAAAT?""

On seeing the words on the screen, Charles and I shouted out.

Our opponents in the first round are Laura and Houki.

"..."

"..."

Located opposite Ichika and Charles was a corner of the air-conditioned changing room that was overcrowded.

One of them was Laura Bodewig, and the other was Shinonono Houki.

Both of them gave off a weird presence, seemingly covering all the heat that was generated.

(My first opponent's Ichika? Why is it this combination ...)

Though Houki closed her eyes, her heart was still wavering.

On the day when the tournament format was switched to a double battle, she continued to wonder whether she should ask Ichika to partner her, and unknowingly, it was already midnight.

But when she rushed to Ichika's room just before midnight, the answer she got was 'I already teamed up with Charles'.

After that, she was thinking of what to do. Once the deadline was reached, her partner was chosen through a lottery, and she ended up teaming with Laura. It seems that the only two 1st years who had to use a lottery were Houki and Laura.

(I wanted to win no matter what!)

--This is bad, this is the worst case scenario.

Though Laura was more than capable in terms of battle prowess, Houki couldn't agree with her, and Laura had no intention of listening to her. Even if she spoke, the most she said was 'Don't get in my way'.

They just couldn't get along.

And also, Houki hated something else--the person who was like her.

Laura felt that strength's everything, reminding Houki of her past self.

It's like my ugly state in the past was seen by others! Houki can't hold back this irritation.

(...No, now's not the time to think about this.)

She couldn't fight if she didn't do this--no, she couldn't fight alongside Ichika.

The hands cupped in front of Houki's chest tightened as she silently gathered her concentration.

"Sure saves a lot of time, meeting in the first round."

"I feel the same."

There're only 5 seconds till the start of the battle, 4, 3, 2 , 1—start.

""DOWN!""

To think that Laura and I would say the same thing.

The moment the battle started, I immediately activated [Ignition Boost]. We'll get a huge advantage if we get the first move.

"WOOOHHH!"

"Humph..."

Laura stretched her right hand out—it's coming.

I remember the conversation I had with Rin and Cecilia, who fought directly with Laura.

"AIC? What is that?"

"It's the [Schwarzer Regen]'s 3rd generation weapon, [Active Inertia Canceller]. It's an ability that removes inertia."

"Hm—"

"Ichika, do you know about PIC?"

"...No."

"Th-That...isn't that basic knowledge? It's basic! All IS uses this [Passive Inertia Control] to float in mid-air, accelerate and stop!"

"Ohh, seems like I heard of it somewhere before."

"Really, you..."

"Okay okay, stop making blind guesses and start thinking about how we should counter it. To be honest, this is the first time I saw it for real as well. It's unbelievable that it has advanced to such an extent."

"Ah, I'm the same as well. To think that it's able to hold down the [Impact Cannons]..."

"But logically, it should work like the [Impact Cannons], right? They create energy to interfere with the space."

"Ah, sort of. I guess it's basically correct. Though the specifics may be different, it does operate similarly to weapons that compress space. It's controlled by energy."

"So that means that [Reiraku Byakuya] should be able to cut through it, right?"

"Logically, that should be the case, but you still got blocked, right?"

"That's true...how did she do that?"

"It's simple. She just needs to touch your hand without touching the [Reiraku Byakuya]."

"Directly...onto the hand? But I'm moving so fast. Can such a small part be blocked?"

"Seems like it. Speaking of which, Ichika, your movements—"

"Are really easy to predict."

"Huh..."

"Your hand movements always move in one straight line, right? Straight down or horizontal. So—"

"She could just block it easily by emitting AIC energy waves in the opposite direction."

"I see...so what should I do?"

"It's your job to find out."

"...You're right."

In the end, I didn't manage to think of a way to accurately break through the AIC.

If that's the case, there's only one method—an unexpected one.

"Ugh...!"

But it seems like this level of tactics have been seen through, as my hands, body and legs got caught by the AIC net, and I couldn't even close in or back away. I couldn't move my body, like it was grabbed by some invisible hand.

"Launching an attacking after the get-go? You're really easy to understand."

"...Nice going, nice going, it's good that we have telepathy."

"Then you should know what I'm about to say."

Yes, I didn't really want to know, but what I could imagine was...*SCREECH!* With the loud sound of the large wheel spinning, [Byakushiki]'s sensors let out a warning.

"Enemy's IS railgun is deployed, safety removed—warning! Locked on—warning!"

Don't worry, this isn't a 1 vs 1 battle, is it?

"I won't let you."

Charles jumped over my head and began firing her .61 cal sub machine gun [Garm] and started to fire the explosive bullets that scattered down like rain.

""Che...!""

Laura's cannons deviated slightly due to Charles' attacks, and the shots missed me. Also, because of Charles' attacks, she had to back away and widen the distance between both of us.

"Don't you run away!"

Charles immediately changed her gun and pointed it forward, summoning an assault rifle on the left hand. Light gathered in the air and formed a gun in less than a second.

This is Charles' special skill [rapid switch], summoning weapons in battle without calling it out. This could be pulled off due to Charles' skill and decision making.

"Don't forget about me here."

Mobilized in the [Uchigane], Houki appeared to block the attack that was aimed at Laura as she deployed a physical shield that was well-suited for a defensive IS, knocking the bullets aside as she hacked at Charles.

"You're the one who forgot about me!"

Being released from Laura's AIC, I immediately accelerated towards Charles from behind. Just when I'm about to crash into her, she did a backflip to switch positions with me. This chemistry is all due to the special training.

KLANG!

Houki and I are locked in close-ranged combat as the hits let out sparks.

I continued to use my sword to attack and defend as I increased the power of my thrusters. The accelerated slashes started to push Houki back.

"Ugh! Damn it...!"

Being pushed back, Houki panicked and raiseed her sword up high. Now's the time!

"Charles!"

"Got it!"

CLACK! I used both hands to grip the sword tightly and used the [Yukihira Niigata] to knock Houki's attack aside. At this moment, Charles, who was on standby behind me stretched both hands out. She was holding two .62 caliber auto shotguns [Rain of Saturdays], and it was impossible to dodge them at this short range.

It was too late for Houki as she went pale, and Charles squeezed the triggers.

"?"

Houki disappeared right in front of us, and the rain of bullets zoomed past vacuum. What's going on?

"How bothersome."

Having switched positions with Houki, Laura quickly closed in on me. She used one of the cable guided blades on Houki's leg and used the centrifugal force to toss her to the edge of the arena. It seemed that Houki was able to do an emergency landing through the whip.

"Wh-What are you doing!?"

But Laura wasn't intending to help her partner at all. She just wanted to throw Houki aside, thinking that she's a bother, resulting in Houki pouting in rage.

However, Laura herself didn't hear that as she launched the attack at us.

Laura deployed the plasma blades and attacked us from both sides. The mix of slashes and stabs accurately forced us to back away.

"It's more advantageous for me to have a disadvantage in numbers."

"It's just twice the number!"

Laura Bodewig, who would actually say such words, is truly as strong as a monster. Right now, she was engaging in close range combat with me as she held Charles off with the cabled blades to separate her from me. Though she couldn't combat all 6 cabled blades at the same time, she swiftly shot them out and retracted them in fluidly to create a rapid-fire attack.

"Are you alright, Charles?"

"What about you, Ichika? I'll support you now."

"No, it's alright. It'll be that battle then."

"...I got it."

We switched to the private frequency to talk for a short while and switched our battle plan to what we originally planned, which was to 'Beat Houki down first'. She can complain afterwards anyway.

The reason why we chose this plan was simple—basically, Laura's battle strategy was to go up

against many enemies at one go, which she would never expect to fight in group, so she probably wouldn't help Houki.

So, we should beat Houki and attack Laura in a 2 vs 1 situation. Of course, like I just said, Laura has the ability to take on many machines at one go, but this is where the trap lies. A tag team is formed by having 1 plus 1, but there aren't 2 possibilities.

"Sorry, but your opponent isn't Ichika."

"What...? Don't look down on me!"

Leaving Laura's range, Charles immediately closed in on Houki. Houki didn't understand what was going on, but Charles' taunt certainly made her blood boil.

KLANG! Charles used the close-ranged knife [Bread Slicer] to block Houki's sword, and then, while maintaining the position, she starts to fire the [Rain of Saturday] with her left hand.

"Kuu...!"

The impression that Charles gave was that she's really strong at shooting, but actually, the biggest attribute about this ability is 'flexibility'--and in fact, she won't lose to anyone in combat. Also, with the [rapid switch] skill, once the opponent feels that she wants to fight it out with melee style, she can suddenly switch into a gun to shoot, and once the distance is pulled apart, she can close in to close combat range again. She can maintain a certain distance and attack motion whether the opponent's near or far away, and her attacks and defenses are great. This stability is hard to break through.

On a side note, this tactic is said to be called the 'Desert Mirage', which is 'The closer it is, the further it gets; once one gives out, it closes in again; called in by the green

lushness and forgetting the fatigue on the legs as one steps closer towards death'. I understand it now.

"So it's a tactic of beating one person? That's meaningless."

Laura most likely never factored Houki in, but this to us was still meaningful. Anyway, my role was to hold off Laura's attacks until Charles beats Houki.

The 2 plasma blades in her hands and the cabled wires form wave after wave of attacks, and it wasn't easy to deflect them all. Also, once I'm not careful, the distance would be pulled apart. So I could only hang on and maintain close proximity.

"You only have that sword as your only weapon, so you can only damage the opponent being in close range, right?"

That was also another reason, right? However, the main reason was because if the distance was pulled apart again, I would become the target of that large caliber railgun, and she had those electric cable-controlled blades. If the distance was pulled apart, I would have to use a lot of time and energy just to get close to her.

(Anyway, I have to hang on!)

I switched the [Yukihira Niigata] to my right hand and used my left to hold Laura's plasma blade off by grabbing her left hand. My legs were maintaining their position as they continued to operate fully, kicking the cabled blades aside. The movements of the cabled blades were very complicated, I would be scratched if I didn't kick it to the side, so right now, the situation is that 'It will be over if I don't concentrate'.

"WOOOOHHH!!!"

KLANG! *CRAK!* *SCREECH!* *KLAMM!*

This was a zero distance battle, and I didn't know when my concentration would run out as I continued to rely on Charles.

"...Time to end this."

Laura shut the plasma blades off. Not good!

BAM! My body froze like ice. Laura's blades were crossed as she raised her hands towards me.

(Damn it! It's the AIC!)

"Alright—disappear."

Six cabled blades shot out at me.

"DAMN IT!"

It was useless to shout as the cabled wires pierced into my body and took off 1/3 of my IS armor. My shield reserves dropped to nearly half.

And Laura's attacks weren't stopping as she used 2 cabled wires to tie my right hand and twist it around a few times, seemingly trying to twist it off and slam me to the ground.

"WAH!"

Unable to take the impact that pierced through me, my breathing immediately stopped.

--Got to stand up fast!

Just when I thought about this, Laura's large railgun is aimed at me.

"This is the end!"

BAM--!

The scene in front of me looked extremely slow as the bullet shot out with flames surrounding it at the cannon and moved forward after passing through the flames. That was a unique anti-armor bullet, and once it hit the spot, it would decide the victor. And right now, it was coming at me.

(Can't dodge it! Then...let's slice it!)

It wasn't about slicing it, but that everything would be over if I didn't do so. Thus, I gathered my strength in my right hand to raised the sword--

"!"

--My right hand suddenly stopped.

(The cabled wires are still tied on my hand!)

There's only one, but it's holding [Byakushiki]'s forearm armor, so I couldn't take it off immediately. Ahhh damn it!

"Sorry to keep you waiting!"

KLANG! With a heavy sound, Charles used her shield to block the shot, and then sliced the cabled blade apart to drag me away from the battlezone.

After that, rain-like bullets flew at where I was.

"You saved me there...Thanks Charles!"

"No problems."

"Where's Houki?"

"She's taking a break."

After saying that, Charles turned to look aside, and I turned to look at where she was looking—at the side of the arena, there was an unhappy looking Houki, who was in a severely damaged IS with 0 shields and kneeling on one leg.

"Nice!"

"Say that after we win!"

Charles tossed aside the twin assault rifles in her hands to summon new weapons—they were an auto shotgun and a machine gun.

"Now's the real show."

"Right, let's show her our chemistry!"

"Wow--that's amazing! They managed to work together like this after just training for slightly more than 2 weeks."

Inside the observation room that could only be accessed by teachers, Maya was watching the battle footage as she marveled at them and muttered.

"Orimura-kun's really amazing. He sure is talented!"

"Humph, it's only because of Dunois' co-operation that they were able to do that. That person didn't even do anything."

Seeing Chifuyu criticize her own family member like that, Maya could only smile awkwardly and say,

"But even so, isn't it amazing that Orimura-kun's able to work with others like this? Nobody would want to work with him if he didn't have charisma."

"Well...I guess you're right."

Though Chifuyu frowned as she answered, recently, Maya started to realize that the action was meant to hide her embarrassment, so she didn't really mind. Thinking about it, perhaps this was a 'Show of protectiveness of her own little brother'.

"But the reason why they suddenly changed the format of the individual division tournament was because of the 'Incident' last month, right?"

The incident that happened last month--when the black machine attacked. Most of them felt that it was a terrorist plot. As attacking IS Academy was a serious problem, and since they found out that it was an unmanned suit, the situation got even more critical. Right now, many countries were all suspecting whether they should start to doubt each other.

"Though I haven't heard about the specifics, that's most likely the case. They chose to adopt a tag team system to let the students gain more battle experience."

"But the 1st years enrolled just 3 months ago, right? Besides, it's not that a war really happened. I guess there shouldn't be any need for mock battle trainings..."

Maya was correct, and Chifuyu knew that she would ask this question, which is why her expression didn't change.

"It's because of what happened last month. Now that we have many freshmen who have their own 3rd generation frames. When they're facing a mysterious enemy who suddenly appeared, what should they be worrying about?"

"--Ah! So you want them to defend themselves?"

"That's right. Forget about the pilots, we still need to protect the 3rd generation IS that were issued. However, we have a limited number of teachers, so the principle is to let them defend themselves, which is why there's a need for practical mock battles."

"Oh, I see!"

Maya's questions melted away like ice.

Basically, IS technology must be revealed, but if newly developed technology was revealed immediately, the other countries could easily use it, so this wouldn't be beneficial to them.

If the IS pilot is unable to familiarize herself with the important parts of the technology, the developing country would be lead to ruin.

And this is the aim of IS Academy.

Hidden amongst the mission of IS Academy when it was first developed was the element 'All the laws don't work here'. Of course, it wasn't that all laws were ineffective against IS Academy; the main point was the ' Prototype IS Technology'.

"This place allows new technology to be tested out, and they can decide on whether they want to reveal their data here. They have no need to reveal it."

In other words, IS Academy was the only place in the world where 'They don't have to declare the data of their mock battles'. That is why China, England, Germany and other countries were sending their 3rd generation IS here .

Also, their real aim was to get the [one-off ability] and fuse with it. As long as their IS could switch into second phase within 3 years to create a one and only unique ability, they would have no problems with revealing

their technology. That was because a 'one and only unique ability' definitely couldn't be imitated.

Of course, the chances of success were astronomically small, but with 3 years of piloting experience, the data gained will become a huge experience.

It's because of this that the IS Academy students already got the latest models even though they were just representative candidates.

The ones chosen to pilot these frames are definitely elites, but there aren't just one. To put it radically, anyone who fulfills the criteria can do. Thus, at the candidate state, there wasn't really a large difference."

"But Shinonono-san was really trashed thoroughly."

"That's what happens when you don't have a personal machine, and in terms of character, Shinonono's at a disadvantage to Dunois."

It's like janken[2D 1]. Chifuyu added as she turns to look at the screen away.

On the screen, it showed Laura still fighting against her opponents despite this disadvantageous situation.

"Bodewig-san, she's strong."

"Humph..."

While Maya was really amazed, Chifuyu snorted, seemingly bored.

"Nothing changed. The potential and attack are the same, but even so--"

She still can't beat Ichika.

But she definitely can't say these words. If she says it, Maya may start to say something again.

WAAAHHH!!!

The atmosphere in the arena boils as the cheers enter the observation room.

"Ah! Orimura-kun took out the [Reiraku Byaku]! Does he intend to settle this in one attack?"

"Looking at this, things won't go as planned."

"Here we go again. Even if you act like you don't care, that attitude's--"

"Yamada-sensei, we haven't done any martial arts sparring for a long time. Now's a rare chance, so how about 10 rounds?"

"No, no thanks! I...ahem...have to watch the students' machines!"

Yamada frantically shakes her head and waves her hands, but Chifuyu uses a deep voice to declare,

"I hate people who come up with nonsense to make fun of me the most. Do you remember that incident?"

"Ye-Yes...I'm sorry..."

Maya, who was retreating and curling back, looked really pitiful, and because of that, Chifuyu patted her head gently.

"Alright, continue to watch the match. It's worth seeing how they intend to beat their opponent."

"Ye-Yes!"

"I'LL BEAT YOU WITH THIS!"

I activated [Reiraku Byakuya] and charged at Laura.

"I heard that all the shields will be drained once I touch it...but it's nothing if I don't get hit."

Laura's AIC binding attacks continued to assault me. My right hand, left hand, my vision, all these continued to be assaulted. I immediately stopped, turned and accelerated, barely dodging them all in the process.

"Running around like that, what an eyesore...!"

She then started to become more vicious in her attacks while striking at me with more cabled blades, but I wasn't fighting alone.

"Ichika! Break through the front at 2 o' clock!"

"Okay!"

Laura, who's attacking using her ranged weapons, wasn't relaxing against my guard. I began to feel that it was great to be on the same team as Charles. If she were an opponent, it'd be really weird to go up against her, somehow.

"Che...another of your petty tricks!"

After zipping through the cabled blades, Laura finally entered my range.

"It's useless, I can predict your attack."

"That normal slash's just a start, then--what about this!?"

I raise the tip of the sword that was below my foot to chest-level.

"!?"

If the slash can be predicted, then I'll just stab in. Though it's easy to predict as well, the trajectory of the hand should be difficult to grasp. It's way harder to predict that than a line.

"IT'S USELESS!"

BZZT! My body froze as the AIC net completely stops me.

"I have no need to focus on your hand. As long as I stop you before that--"

"...Ahh, what's wrong, have you forgotten? Don't you know? We're--a tag team!"

"!?"

Laura frantically moved her eyes, but it was too late. Closing in to zero distance, Charles quickly fired off 6 shotgun bullets, and at the next moment, Laura's large railgun exploded with a loud bang.

"Ku...!"

As what we predicted, Laura's AIC had a fatal flaw. The flaw was that 'If she didn't focus on the target she wanted to stop, she wouldn't be able to maintain the effect', so right now, I was freed.

"ICHIKA!"

"GOT IT!"

I again raised the [Yukihira Niigata] and got into position--she shouldn't be able to escape this time!

"...!"

This was the sure-kill hit that I so believed in, but unexpectedly--

KUriiiii...

"WHAT? HOW CAN THE ENERGY RUN OUT AT THIS TIME!"

It seemed like I took a lot of damage, as the energy blade of [Reiraku Byakuya] began to shrink with the sound of the voice before disappearing.

"What a pity."

Laura's voice was close. I turned around, and saw her leap into me and deploy her twin plasma blades.

"SINCE YOU'VE USED UP YOUR SHIELD ENERGY, YOU CAN'T FIGHT ANY LONGER! I'LL WIN WHEN I GIVE YOU ANOTHER HIT!"

Laura was right. My shield reserves would drop to 0 if I was attacked again, and it would be determined a loss for me. Either way, I continued to block the vicious blade attacks that were coming from both sides.

"I WON'T LET YOU!"

"YOU'RE ANNOYING!"

Laura didn't stop in her attacks on me as she continued to use the cabled blades to hold off Charles, who came in to support me. Her attacks on both sides were as fast and accurate as ever, and with this, we again found out how skilled our opponent was.

"WAH!!"

"CHARLES! KU--"

"THE NEXT ONE WILL BE YOU! FALL!"

Distracted that Charles got hit, I let my guard down, and Laura definitely didn't let this opportunity slip as her attack hit me cleanly.

"GUWAHH...!!"

This hot sensation is the numbing sense of an electrical flow surge through me. The feeling can't be described in words, but it indicated that I got damage.

The strength swept out of my body--and [Byakushiki], as I fell onto the floor.

"Ha...HAHAHA! IT'S MY WIN!"

A fast moving silhouette attacked Laura, who loudly proclaimed herself the winner. That's--

"IT'S NOT OVER YET!"

That was Charles, who immediately used [Ignition Boost] to the maximum speed.

"WHAT...! THAT'S [IGNITION BOOST]!"

For the first time, Laura showed a dumbstruck look. Maybe it was because the data never specified that Charles could use [Ignition Boost], and I was shocked as well--because even I didn't know of that.

"Well...this is the first time I'm using it!"

"Wh, WHAT...? DON'T TELL ME YOU LEARNT IT DURING THIS BATTLE!?"

It seems now that Charles' flexibility isn't just a unique attribute, but a skill altogether. Maybe one can even call it a 'one and only unique ability'.

"Humph...BUT IT'S NO USE AGAINST MY STOPPING BARRIER!"

Laura said as she switched into the AIC activation mode, however, the one who stopped was--Laura herself.

BOOM!

"!?"

Being attacked somewhere that's unexpected, Laura looks around before seeing me, who's right below her. I'm holding the loaded sub machine gun that Charles threw just now.

That's right, that's the gun that I was allowed to use in the training. At this point, Laura finally realized that the throwing of the loaded gun just now was Charles and my double-set plan.

Now, I could only believe, in myself, and in Charles.

--But though I said that, it had a lot to do with luck. It was [Byakushiki] who managed to hang on against Laura's attacks, and for this time, I really can't show my face to this partner called [Byakushiki].

"NOW YOU CAN'T USE AIC!"

"DAMN IT...YOU HALF-DEAD ZOMBIE!"

Laura shouted, but she still didn't lose her cool. She probably would ignore my inaccurate shooting and focus on Charles. She again aimed the AIC in front.

"But I got a window to attack now."

"SO WHAT! WITH A 2ND-GENERATION'S ATTACK POWER, TRYING TO TAKE DOWN THIS [SCHWARZER REGEN] IS--"

At this moment, Laura suddenly stopped.

That's right. She discovered the strongest weapon amongst the 2nd generation in terms of offensive power,

And Charles always had this weapon hidden in her shield.

"I WON'T MISS AT THIS RANGE!"

Charles' shield armor opens, revealing the wheel and pilebunker that was fused together. It's the .69 caliber battering ram [Gray Scale], also known as--

"[SHIELD PIERCE]!?"

For the first time, Laura revealed a panicked expression that showed that she didn't expect to make it.

""OOOOHHHH!!""

Both voices overlapped. Charles clenched her left hand to charge forward, and it was a simple forward thrust like what I had just done.

However, what's different is that she even used [Ignition Boost] to close in, so it was too late to even activate AIC on her. If Laura couldn't stop the battering ram between these few millimeters, she would be hit directly.

"!!!"

Laura focused on that target--but missed.

In a moment, just for a short moment, Charles showed an angelic smile that looks like a declaration of death, a dazzling yet guilt-ridden smile.

BAM!!!

"KUuu...!"

The battering ram hit Laura's abdomen. If she concentrated all her shield reserves and activated [Absolute Defense], she could block this hit, but as her reserves were almost drained, she couldn't block the impact, and it slammed hard through her body. Laura's face twisted with anguish.

However, the attack was not over. As the [Gray Scale] had a roller function, it could be quickly filled with explosives--in other words, there were multiple shots.

BAM!!! *BAM!!!* *BAM!!!*

Three consecutive hits. Laura's body trembled terribly. Purple electricity jumped up her frame, forming a forced ejection sign.

--But in the next moment, another change occurred.

(To think that I...would actually lose here, me...!)

It's true that I underestimated that opponent's power, and that was a mistake on my part. But even so--

(I CAN'T LOSE! HOW CAN I LOSE...!)

Laura Bodewig. This is my name. A code to identify myself.

My earliest codename was Gene Perfection Experiment C—0037.

I was created through artificial human means, born out of a metal womb.

--It was dark. I was in darkness.

I was created, born, bred and trained to fight. That's my only objective.

I only know how to attack humans. I only understand tactics on how to defeat the enemy. I learnt to fight, use guns and remember how to use weapons.

I was outstanding, and in terms of capabilities, I always had the best records.

But at that time, as the strongest weapon, the IS appeared, and my world suddenly changed.

The operation to implant the [Odin's Eye] into me in order caused a drastic change.

The actual term of [Odin's Eye] should be a hyper-sensor package, and what it does is that it can heighten nerve processing to the brain at an explosive speed. The aim is to react quickly in a hi-speed combat. The operation was supposed to transplant the nanomachines into my eyes, and those eyes that went through this operation are called the 'Eyes that Surpasses the World'.

There were no risks with the operation, and logically, there wouldn't be a rejection—logically.

However, this operation caused my left eye to turn gold, and I couldn't control it. It couldn't shut down on its own, it was always activated.

This 'Accident' caused me to deteriorate amongst my peers in IS training.

I don't know when I fell from the top position. What awaited me were the mockeries and humiliations of my peers, and the mark of 'Trash'.

My world changed—I went from infinite darkness to even more darkness.

And the first time I met the light, it was when I met the instructor—Orimura Chifuyu.

"Though you look like your grades are bad, there's nothing much to worry. In a month from now, you should be able to get back to being the strongest in your squad. You're going to be trained by me after all."

Those words weren't a lie. Though I just obeyed that person's training honestly, I managed to get back to the top after I started learning IS.

However, I couldn't stay in the same situation. I didn't care about my peers who drifted away from me.

I continued to admire that person greatly.

Strong, courageous, indomitable. Seeing her like that made me anxious.

--Ah, I really want to be like this, I really want to be like her.

With these emotions, I would talk to her when I had the time before she went back to her own country half a year ago.

No, it's alright even if we don't say anything. As long as I could stay with her and stare at her figure, I can feel strength coming out from within.

It's somewhat a feeling of 'Courage'.

Maybe that's because she had such power.

One day, I tried to ask,

"How did you become this strong? What must I do to become this strong?"

At that time—ah, it's at that time...that person, that instructor who was as strict as the devil showed a gentle smile.

For some reason, it felt like my heart got punctured through by a needle.

"I have a little brother."

"A little brother...?"

"Once you see him, you'll understand, what's strength, and what's more than strength."

"...I don't understand."

"It's good that you remain like that. Ah, if you have a chance to come to Japan one day, maybe you can meet him...but let me give you a warning. That person—"

A gentle smile, a fearful expression. That's—

(That's not right. That wasn't what I envisioned you—Strong, courageous, indomitable, that's you.)

So—I won't forgive the person who made instructor show this expression.

I can't agree with the existence of this little brother who made instructor like this.

So—

(I MUST DEFEAT HIM! USE MY OWN POWER TO BEAT THAT GUY, THAT BASTARD...INTO DUST!)

That's why, I can't lose here! That guy, that bastard's... still moving. I must thoroughly break him until he can't move! That's right! So—

(I WANT POWER!)

Ku...someone rumbled deep inside me.

Then, it spoke.

"—Do you wish for it...? Do you, wish for a change within yourself...? Do you want a stronger power...?"

Of course. If I have power, if I can get it—I'll even pay for it with this hollow existence!

So give it to me...give me the invincible, strongest, absolute power!

Damage Level...D

Mind Condition...Uplift

Certification...Clear

[Valkyrie Trace System]...boot.

"AAAHHHHHHH!!!"

It seemed that Laura just got ripped by something as she let out a scream. At the same time, [Schwarzer Regen] let out a strong electrical jolt and knocked Charles off.

"Ugh! What's going on...--!!!"

"WHAT'S THAT!?"

Charles and I couldn't believe our eyes. In front of us, Laura...her IS was changing!

No, it wasn't that simple to say that it was changing. The lines that formed the armor were melting softly into something soft and sticky, engulfing Laura's body in it.

The pitch black corroded darkness swallowed Laura in whole.

"What *is* that thing..."

I subconsciously muttered. I guess anyone who sees this would think the same thing.

Normally, IS won't change shapes, or more accurately, it can't.

IS could only change shape 'In the first shift when it gets used to the pilot' and 'Switches Modes'. Though the equipment and some other parts may change slightly, it was impossible to have a base change. Anyway, that was just impossible. That's a flaw on the design.

However, the impossible thing was happening in front of us right now.

And this wasn't just a change in shape, but a mud doll that was shaped through the fusing of the sticky mass.

What was supposed to be [Schwarzer Regen] covered Laura's entire body and continueed to move on the surface. It then started to beat like it had a pulse and slowly descended to the floor.

The moment it landed on the floor, the body looked like it was quickly changing at a high speed before forming a shape.

—Standing over there was 'something' similar to the black IS, but it was completely different from the one that attacked last month.

The appearance and shape was of Laura's shape. The girl's hands and feet were armed with the minimum amount of armor, and the head had armor that covered the entire body. Also, the red lights of the display sensors could be seen from the eye below the armor.

The problem, however, was the weapon in her hand. I definitely couldn't be mistaken. That's—

"[Yukihira]...!"

It was similar to the sword Chifuyu-nee once used.

It was basically a duplicate.

I subconsciously gripped onto the [Yukihira Niigata] and raised it to the middle.

"—!"

The next moment, the black IS flew toward me. Looking at the way she was keeping the sword behind her waist, she must be trying to use an Iai technique. If she used it at a distance where I'd definitely be hit, it'd be a flash sure-kill hit. That was definitely the katana technique that Chifuyu-nee uses.

"KU!"

The [Yukihira Niigata] that I was holding tight on was knocked away, and the enemy raised the sword up—not good!

"!"

The sharp slash that was swung down straight on assaulted me, and I couldn't receive it with my sword at the last minute. At that moment, I immediately ordered [Byakushiki] to 'back away'.

It was because I knew how Chifuyu-nee fought that I was barely able to dodge it.

However, [Byakushiki]'s shield reserves had already dropped to 0, and the left hand only got a little grazed, yet there was blood flowing out.

That emergency evasion took out the last of me, and [Byakkushiki] disappeared from me in a glow of light.

"...So what..."

But right now, it doesn't matter to me.

"SO WHAT!!!??"

Driven by burning emotions, I clenched my fists as my weapons and rushed towards the black IS.

—Unforgivable, unforgivable, UNFORGIVABLE!

"WOOOHHH!!!"

Just as my fists nearly hit the black IS, my body got dragged away in the opposite direction.

Once I felt the impact on my back, I realized that the one who pulled me was Houki, who was equipped with the [Uchigane].

"IDIOT! WHAT ARE YOU DOING! DO YOU WANT TO DIE?"

"LET GO OF ME! THAT PERSON'S JUST TOYING WITH ME! LET ME GO BEAT HER UP!"

That technique just now was the first technique I learnt from Chifuyu-nee, and I can still remember the first time I saw it.

"Listen Ichika, a sword is to be swung, but just trying to swing it isn't kendo.''

To me, who lifted that heavy piece of metal item for the first time, the weight alone made it hard for me to carry it. I was already sweating while it was on my hand, and I couldn't even lift it because of the weight even though I tried to make a pose.

"It's heavy, isn't it? This is the weight of a weapon, one that can take someone's life away."

The cold and slightly glittering katana.

An existence that was born, created and refined to kill.

"You have to consider what does it means to carry such a weight. This is what it means to be strong."

When she said that, Chifuyu-nee's eyes were stern, yet it had a tinge of gentleness. It looked somewhat dazzling, an expression that was different from usual.

That was why I chose to become strong, to become Chifuyu-nee's supporting power...that's right, ever since that day, I always—

"LET GO OF ME, HOUKI! IF EVEN YOU DARE TO INTERFERE, I'LL—!!"

"Che! GET A GRIP!"

PA! My face got hit, and I flew away and landed horizontally on the floor.

My face felt the pain as it touched the icy cold floor, causing my rage to drop.

"What's going on!? Tell me in a way that I can understand!"

"That...that's Chifuyu-nee's data, CHIFUYU-NEE'S! THAT'S SOMETHING THAT ONLY CHIFUYU-NEE HAS! THAT...DAMN IT!"

The black IS remained motionless in the arena. Right now, it seemed like it was automatically programmed to attack anything that had weapons or that would attack.

"Really, you...always Chifuyu-nee this Chifuyu-nee that."

"That's not all! The corrupted power that Laura's using , I don't like her for doing that. The black IS, Laura...both of them...I HAVE TO PUNCH THEM!"

Power—this so-called strength wasn't referring to offensive power. That power couldn't be called strength, but mere violence.

"Anyway, I must beat that thing up. I need to calm down first."

"I understand your reasons, but what can you do now? [Byakushiki] doesn't even have any energy; how are you going to fight?"

"Ku..."

Houki was right. It was likely that the black IS didn't have much energy left, but it was meaningless if I didn't beat her down. And right now [Byakushiki] didn't even have enough energy to deploy, let alone attack.

"Urgent emergency! All matches are suspended! Situation's at level D. Teachers are to deploy to suppress the enemy! All guests and students, please evacuate! I repeat!"

"You heard it. Others will handle this even if you don't do anything, so—"

"So there's no need to jump into a dangerous situation necessarily, right?"

"That's right."

Houki was right, but even though that reasoning was sound, my consciousness—still refused it.

"That's wrong, Houki, completely wrong. It's not that 'I have to do it', but 'I want to do it'. I don't care what others think, but I won't be me if I back away now. I won't be Orimura Ichika!"

"Ah, you idiot! Now what are you going to do? You already ran out of ene—"

"If you don't have it, just get it from somewhere else. Isn't that right, Ichika?"

"Charles..."

Charles seemed to have recovered from the jolt just now as she gently landed beside us.

"It can't be helped if it's just a normal IS, but I guess my [Revive] can use the core circuits to transfer energy."

"Really? Thanks, hurry up and help me!"

"But!"

Charles sternly warned. Her tone's abnormally harsh, not allowing any arguments.

"But you must promise me not to lose."

"Of course! I'll swear with all my life here that if I lose now, I'm not a man."

"Then, if you lose, tomorrow, Ichika, you have to wear a girl's uniform to school."

"Ku...! I-I'll do that! I won't lose anyway!"

This little joke manages to remove some tension, and my mind that was flushed with anger is cooled off to a fine extent.

"Then let's start...opening the [Revive]'s core circuits and allow the outflow of energy. Ichika, set the [Byakusiki]'s mode at single 1 mode. You should be able to use [Reiraku Byakuya] now."

"Oh, got it."

The cables reached out of the [Revive] and attached themselves to [Byakushiki], which was in bracelet mode, and the energy flowed through it. It felt like a sudden surge in energy. I felt this power as I had an explicable feeling.

(This...feels like that first time when I activated the IS...)

It seemed like I hadn't had this feeling for a long time, and there was an inexplicable sense of reunion and nostalgia, and the feeling that the world was reborn, this feeling of being able to feel the surroundings completely.

"..."

What's going on? Either way, there's no need to bother about this. Right now, the most important thing is right in front of me.

"Done! I transferred [Revive]'s remaining power to you ."

As Charles declared, [Revive] scattered into bits of light and disappeared in particles of light.

And [Byakushiki], which was in single 1 mode, began to build itself on my body.

"So the most you can go is the weapon on your right hand."

"That's enough!"

[Byakushiki] understood that I was about to use [Reiraku Byakuya] as it materialized itself on my right hand in the form of [Yukihira Niigata].

No defenses, a definite loss if I get hit, and at best, heavy injuries. However, I was prepared to be hit, and next, it's my turn.

"I-Ichika!"

Houki, who'd been standing on the sidelines till now, finally couldn't help but say something. Her eyes were staring at me, looking extremely serious.

"Don't die...you definitely can't die!"

"What are you worrying about, idiot?"

"Wh-Who's an idiot! I'm worried about you—"

"Just trust me."

"Huh?"

"Trust me, Houki. No need to worry about me, and no need to pray for me. Just believe in me and wait for me. I'll win."

—I'll no longer mistake the meaning of strength. I know what's strength without power. I understand more than others, people who continue to be strong to protect others.

Then, then I hope to be strong for a certain someone, I hope.

"I'm going then."

"Ah, yes! Win, Ichika!"

After I promised Houki that I'd win, I faced the opponent in front of me.

I glanced at Charles, and she didn't say anything, only nodded her head silently. That's enough!

"All right, bring it, you fake!"

My [Yukihira Niigata] in my right hand responded to my will as it deployed.

"[Reiraku Byakuya]—activate!"

Vmmmm...this little reaction sounded like [Byakushiki]'s answer. The blade that could erase all energy sources and negate it appeared with twice the length.

(It doesn't have to be this big now. What I need is speed and sharpness, and to be able to draw the sword fast. A refined blade.)

I gathered my concentration and imagined a shot of light in the darkness. It then became smaller, fine and sharper.

Once this concentration was at the maximum, [Yukihira] changed. What was just a [Yukihira Niigata] that was giving a large glow was now becoming smaller and sharper.

The moment the transformation was complete, the original physical blade of the [Yukihira] was completely gone. The blade was just an energy sword that was made out of the [Reiraku Byakuya], and the energy was forming a katana-shaped blade.

(Thank you, [Byakushiki], then—let's go!)

I kept my blade at my waist and got into a sword drawing position in front of the the black IS.

That was a fusion of what Chifuyu-nee taught me and what I learnt from Houki, the 'First Flash, Second Strike' move.

"Listen, you must draw the blade through its weight, not through your hand, but to be treated as a part of your body. When drawing, don't do too many unnecessary movements. No gaps, no mistakes."

"Ah, really, why don't you understand! I'll show it to you! Watch!"

Both of their postures overlap in my mind, forming my own posture.

I lowered my body and readied myself, bringing the hand with the sword behind me. My eyes continued to gaze forward, and a motionless surface of water appeared in my heart.

Then, while it seemed that I could respond to all the movements, I sealed my feelings, that consciousness into a single spot, right at the enemy in front of me.

"..."

The black IS swung down the sword. That was a move identical to Chifuyu-nee's, a slash that quickly attacked the enemy from the shoulder on one side to the waist to the other side. However, there was none of Chifuyu-nee's will there. In other words, that's—

"THAT'S JUST AN IMITATION!"

KLANG! My horizontal strike that was drawn from the waist knocked the enemy's blade aside.

Then, I immediately raised the sword above my head and slashed the enemy down from the top.

This is the 'First Flash, Second Strike'. The first is to strike like a flash, and the other is to slash the target,

"Ke, kre...klak..."

Bzzt...the purple electricity jumped about, and the black IS got sliced in half. And the moment Laura was about to lose consciousness, I exchanged looks with her. Her eyepatch dropped off, revealing the golden left eye.

She stared at me with a really weak expression, like one of an abandoned puppy, seemingly saying: Please save me.

"...Well, I won't beat you up then."

I hugged Laura, who lost her strength as I muttered. As for whether she heard it, I guess only she knows.

"Let me give you some advice. Once you meet that guy , make sure you have a strong heart, because though that person's really immature, for some reason, he sure can attract the girls easily. You may fall for him if you're not careful, you know?"

Instructor seemed to say that happily, even showing some slight embarrassment, and that really irritated me.

So--I understood. Yes, I felt jealous, so I finally asked,

"Have you fallen for him, instructor?"

"That's stupid. How can an elder sister fall for her little brother?"

She smiled as she said that, and I couldn't calm down. That guy was able to let the instructor show such an expression--I was envious of him.

And then, after we met, after the battle, I understood.

What is strength?

There should be numerous answers.

But I found one of them.

"Strength is where the heart is, where you stand. I guess that would mean consider what will happen to me. "

...Is that it?

"I guess it should be. Forget about how strong you are, if you don't even know what you're doing, you don't even know where to go, correct?"

...How should I go...

"Go somewhere, where you want to go...and things like that."

...Where must I go...

"In other words, you'll win if you do what you want. Isn't it bad to worry or restrain yourself?"

And then, this guy--this man--he smiled and said,

"You must do what you want to do. Isn't that what life is supposed to be about?"

--Then, what about you...? Why do you want to get stronger? What makes you strong?

"I'm not strong. I'm...not strong at all."

He replied so firmly, and I couldn't answer back.

He had such strength, and yet he said that he wasn't strong. I really couldn't understand.

"But if you claim that I'm strong, I would be because--"

--Because...?

"Because I want to become strong, that's why I would be strong."

--

"And there's something I want to do after I become strong."

--Something, you want to do...?

"I want to protect someone, using my all, I just want to fight for someone with my all."

--That's exactly...like that person.

"Yeah, so because of that, I'll protect you too, Laura Bodewig."

Hearing him say this, my heart wavered strongly for the first time due to this impact.

"I'll protect you."

He said that. I--ahh, I see, so that's it...that's how it is.

My heart moved.

My rapidly pulsating heart indicated that in front of him, I was just a 15 year old 'girl'.

--Orimura, Ichika.

Ahh, that, that's right.

I seem to have fallen for him.

"Uu, ahh..."

The sunlight shone down on Laura, waking her up.

"Are you awake?"

She remembers this voice. She had heard it before--and not only that, Laura was able to deduce where she heard of it before. It was the instructor she so loved and respected, Orimura Chifuyu.

"What's...with me...?"

"Your entire body took too much burden, causing wounds and muscle fatigue. You can't move at the moment. Don't force yourself."

After finishing, Chifuyu wanted to change the topic, but Laura was still her past student, it wasn't easy to fool her.

"What...happened...?"

Laura barely managed to lift her upper body up. Her face twisted in agony due to the pain that spread throughout her entire body. However, her eyes were staring intently at Chifuyu. The eyepatch was taken off her left eye for surgery, and it was a golden eye that was different from the eye on her right. This mysterious eye was merely showing a puzzled look.

"Hoo...basically, this is both a major case and a top secret article."

However, Chifuyu knew that she wasn't someone who would give up after hearing such an answer, so after she remained silent to indicate that this can't be said to others , she began to speak,

"Do you know of the [VT system]?"

"I do...the actual name is [Valkyrie Trace System]...it records the systems of all the previous Mondo Grosso's Champions. I remember that's..."

"That's right. Right now, the research, and even the development, usage and all is banned under the IS treaty, and it was in your IS."

"..."

"It was hidden really well. The pilot's mental state, the damage the machine took, and most importantly, the pilot's will...no, the desire. It can only activate with all these conditions. right now, the academy's questioning the German Army, and the committee members will most likely carry out an investigation."

On hearing Chifuyu's words, Laura grabbed tightly onto the bedsheets. For some reason, she looked down at the void below her eyes.

"That's because...I wished for this."

I wanted to be you.

Laura didn't say it, but Chifuyu understood.

"Laura Bodewig!"

"Ye-Yes!"

Having her full name called out, Laura looks up in surprise.

"Who are you?"

"I-I'm...I'm...m,..."

She can't continue on. Under this situation, she can't say that she's Laura.

"If you are no one, that's convenient. You will become Laura Bodewig from now on. Besides, there's a lot of time, since you have to stay here. After that, until you die , you still have a lot of time to use, so continue to be bothered, young lady."

"Ah..."

Chifuyu's words confound Laura. As she never expected Chifuyu to encourage her, she didn't know what to do. She didn't know how to answer, as she couldn't even say a single word.

Chifuyu got up from the chair and began to leave. She had said whatever she wanted to say, and was ready to head back to being in the position of a teacher.

"Oh, and also."

Chifuyu put her hand on the door, and without turning back, added on,

"You can't become me. If you become that guy's elder sister, you will continue to worry like me."

She did smile when she said that, right? Laura felt this way.

Then, a few minutes after Chifuyu left the room, Laura began to feel weird.

"Fu, fufu...hahaha."

Ah, such a cunning pair of siblings. Both of them always wanted to run away after saying what they wanted to say.

Having said so much, she still had to consider this. What was more sly than that?

(Think on my own, act on my own. Is that so...)

Though just laughing alone would cause aches in her entire body, Laura still felt happy.

She lost thoroughly, lost completely, but she never felt better.

Right now, the life of Laura Bodewig begins now--

"The tournament is called off due to an unexpected situation. But as the tournament is related to the tracking of individual data, all the matches in the first round will be continued. Please check the changes in locations, dates and times on the PD—"

Beep. Someone turned off the television in the cafeteria. I was watching the TV while eating sea-salt flavored ramen. Though the foreign language film had finished playing, it was rather smooth...I'm talking about the ramen.

"Mn, just like what Charles said."

"Yeah. Ah, Ichika, please pass me the chilli powder."

"Here."

"Thanks."

Though people may criticize us for 'Looking like it didn't involve us even though we were the ones involved ', we were questioned by the teachers all the way until just now, and the cafeteria was about to close when we were finally released. Thus we hastily headed here, only to find a large number of girls waiting at the cafeteria, ready to question us.

Anyway, better finish dinner first. We sat at the table, ready to finish dinner, but the running trailer on the TV showed an important announcement, which was the section just now.

"Phew—I'm full! School cafeteria, hostel cafeteria, it's great to have such delicious food in this school...hm?"

I don't know the reason, but the girls who were waiting for us to finish eating suddenly looked extremely depressed. The way they looked depressed is like a Yamato-class battleship. I'm sorry, I never saw one before .

"...Our chance...to win...gone..."

"Date...wasted..."

"...WAHHH!!"

Pa pa pa. Several people ran out, crying...what, what's wrong now?

"What's going on?"

"No idea..."

Charles and I didn't even know what's going on. At this point, we just found another example of how 'Girls are inexplicable beings'.

After the girls left, I saw someone standing around. That was my familiar childhood friend, Houki.

Houki looked like her soul had just floated out of her mouth...anyway, better get to her.

"Oh yeah, Houki, about our promise last month—"

"Ku."

A response. Good, she's not dead yet.

"I can go out with you."

"—What?"

"I'm saying that I can go out with you...WAH!"

Houki suddenly jumped up like a loosened spring. She just grabbed my neck when I was already a lot taller than her—GUH!!

"RE-REA-REAL...LY!? REA...REAL-REALLY!?"

How many times do you need to say 'really'? It'll become a lie if you continue on. I guess now.

"...Mn, yup."

"Wh-Why? Yo-You, tell me your reason..."

Houki suddenly backed away from me, cupped her chest and gave a dry cough. Why is her face so red...well, forget about it.

"That's because it's a request from a childhood friend, so I can go along with you..."

"I-Is that so?"

"...On a shopping trip that is."

Ugh! Houki's expression's really scary...hey, hey! Is that what an oni's[2D 2] expression is like?

"...That's..."

"Hey, hey."

Was Houki's expression's really this terrifying? It's best not to irritate her. Those who have eaten nitroglycerin and chilli should be treated [delicate] and [softly].

"YOU THOUGHT IT WAS SOMETHING LIKE THAT!?"

MOVE!

"GUH!"

She launched a straight punch that was empowered with the twisting of the waist, causing my eyes to seemingly be covered by a black cloth--Sei kobushi no buratsuku sumi su[2D 3]...never mind.

"Humph!"

BAM! Ugh, her toes landed straight in my chest.

I-Idiot, I just saw your panties already...--let me tell you, it's white.

"U-Ug-Ugh..."

I immediately collapsed onto the floor, and couldn't see Houki stomp away angrily...it seems like I got critically damaged. Right now, I didn't want to move, and I couldn't move anyway.

"Ichika, sometimes I feel that you're doing it on purpose."

"Wh-What? What do you mean?"

"What do you think?"

Charles suddenly looked away. What the heck, what's...

It was 15 minutes later before I finally recovered.

Stroking my still-aching abdomen, I faced Charles as we sat.

"Oh yeah, I got some things to ask you."

"Okay, what is it? You can ask anything."

Having finished her Tsukimi udon, Charles smiled as she answered. Though we seemed to have met a lot of terrible stuff ever since the tournament ended, for some reason, she seemed to be in a good mood.

"Can we actually talk through IS? Huh, not by private channels. It's like talking to each other in a space both people have."

"Hm? Well...I seem to have heard of it before. Though it's thought to be the interference in the IS network, but in fact, it should be some sort of a consciousness interference when the pilots are of the same wavelength, or something like that."

"Ohh, that may be the case. But, the wave...wavelength . I really don't understand."

"IS itself has a lot of phenomenons and functions that can't be understood, and also, the inventor, Professor Shinonono Tabane didn't even reveal the complete details and disappeared. Though she once said that IS is designed to improve itself, it seems like she herself couldn't grasp it, so she couldn't even roughly describe it. "

"Well, that sounds like what Tabane-san would do..."

That person basically wouldn't bother with things she wasn't interested in...she could have checked it out herself. Seems like she deliberately chose not to do so.

As I continued to think this, I suddenly noticed Charles staring at me—maybe it was just me or that I was distracted, but she seemed to be rather vexed.

"...Ichika, when you talked about 2 people talking in a space, are you referring to Bodewig?"

"Mn, well, yeah..."

"Hm—I see."

Charles nonchalantly answered as she kept her cutlery. Thanks to the recent training...or the telepathy between partners, I immediately knew that she wasn't happy.

She's trying her best not to show it, so it's almost impossible to detect it, but as she got into that situation, she would emphasize the ending in all her sentences, and she would walk faster.

But why is she unhappy? That's a mystery.

"Ah, Orimura-kun, Dunois-kun. You're here. It was tough on you two."

"You too, Yamada-sensei. It must be tiring to continue recording, right?"

"No, no. I'm already used to such dry work. Don't worry about me. Besides, I'm a teacher after all."

Hehe, Yamada-sensei lifted her chest up, and that voluptuous chest of her shook due to the weight, making me wonder where I should put my eyes on, and I can only look away.

"..."

"Ichika no ecchi."

Though that was just a little side comment, I could hear it clearly.

"Wh-What? Hold on, Charles! That's a misunderstanding!"

"Humph, God knows."

Ah, whatever. Why is her mood so poor? She didn't like to eat tsukiri udon? I did tell her that the traditional way of eating it was to eat the egg last...

"What's wrong?"

"No, nothing, nothing at all."

"I see...well, let's not mention about this. There's good news!"

Yamada-sensei clenched both fists and gave a victory pose, and her breasts bounced again. Well, though it was an eyecandy, it wasn't good for the eyes.

"It's really good news! Starting today, the boys' bath is opened!"

"Ohh! Is that so? I thought we had to wait till next month."

"That's because they had to check the boiler of the baths today, so the students weren't allowed to use it. But now that the inspection's done, there's no need to prevent the 2 guys from using it!"

Great, this is really great! Awesome! To be honest, because of the large number of problems that occurred with the tournament, I really wanted to take a bath to remove all my fatigue.

However...whether it was the inter-class match last month or any of my matches, there always seemed to be something unexpected, something impossible that happened. Right now, my fatigue level's almost at 100%, and I really can't be pleased about it.

"Thank you Yamada-sensei!"

Being extremely touched, I grabbed Yamada-sensei's hands tightly, wrapping my own hands around hers, and my eyes that were staring at Yamada-sensei's eyes

should be glittering like gold...ahh, it's great to have a bath! It can be considered a tradition in Japanese history...no, it may even be the soul of it!

"We-Well...sensei will be troubled if you close in like this! That..."

"Yes?"

"No, nothing, nothing at all! It should be alright, right?"

For some reason, Yamada-sensei was unable to calm down as she looked about. You have to look at others in the eyes when they're talking to you! You said so yourself!

And she was blushing. Does she have a cold? A summer cold affects the body badly. I hope that she can take care of her own body more.

"Ah--...ahem."

Charles coughed dryly a few times to interrupt our conversation, and I suddenly felt that the warmth in her eyes is lower than before. Why is that so? She's not happy about a bath? I am!

"An-Anyway, both of you, please hurry to the bath. You just need to soak your body up to your shoulders to remove all your fatigue, right?"

"Yes! Then let's hurry and go—ah!"

Immediately after I quickly answered, I remembered something.

Yamada-sensei did say 'Both of you, please hurry to the bath'—she did refer to Charles and me like that.

Not, good.

Up until now, Charles had always been attending school as a guy.

It wouldn't be natural to go in separately, and they forced us to use it together. Anyone would roll their eyes about this wasteful manner.

"Huh, what...that..."

"What's wrong? Okay okay. Both of you, hurry and get your change of clothes. I have the key to the bath, so I'll be waiting for both of you in front of the changing room. So then."

After saying that, Yamada-sensei immediately scooted off...ahh, what do we do now...

"...Charles?"

"Well, that's trouble...some. What do we do? An-Anyway, lets go back to the room to get our change of clothes."

"Well, let's just hope that someone up there can find a way for us..."

As we were with a common mindset, she understood it. Anyway, Charles and I headed back to the room first.

While getting our clothes, we still couldn't find a way. We didn't even have time to talk about normal stuff, and could only prepare to bathe.

And then—

"Ah, you're here! Please enter! You're the first ones in!"

"Th-Thanks..."

Sounding really excited, Yamada-sensei sent us in, saying 'Take your time~' as she closed the door to the changing room.

Then, the time of silence came, and Charles and I turned our backs on each other in the changing room.

"..."

"..."

No, this won't do. I want to take a bath, but no matter what, I can't do it together with Charles. Well...I did see her naked before, but that was another thing altogether. As expected, a girl at this age can't show her naked body to guys like that.

And I have to try my best to avoid seeing it.

Though many would say 'It's not like you'll lose a lump of flesh', that's a misunderstanding, a very serious mistake. It's basically idiotic.

They will decrease; the dignity, elegance, value of a girl will drop.

Logically, guys should be protecting girls, so how can I look down on them? That's the 'Lack of Shame' that Houki said.

"E—n...Charles?"

"Ye-Yes?"

Why does she sound so polite now? Sigh, never mind.

I still have to talk to her while facing her. It's really hard to talk to her while our backs are facing each other. But if I have to look at her face, a lot of unexpected things will come out of my mouth. This is really unbelievable.

"You're tired today, right, Charles? Go in then. I'll spend the time outside, and once you're almost done, I'll go back to the room."

"Huh? What about you, Ichika?"

"We can't possibly bathe together, right? Hm, well. Since it's like this, go in and bath then, Charles. I'll go back to the room to bathe."

Guys have to wait silently. Besides, since I have to accommodate my partner Charles, this is nothing. I don't

have to be responsible for strangers, but Charles did care for me a lot.

In modern society, it's not rare to see girls suddenly order a guy they don't know, but if I meet one, I'll definitely reject her without a second thought. No matter who the person is, I have no obligation to listen to any rude and unreasonable orders.

On the other hand, if there's a reason I can agree with that is meaningful, I'll do my best to fulfill it. Don't look at me like that. I'm good at things like domestic stuff and massaging. Chifuyu-nee can guarantee that. Though I may be bragging, I could make a good house-husband, heh heh~

"It, it's alright. I'll wait for you in the changing room. Well...I don't really like to take baths, but you do right, Ichika?"

"I do!"

Of course I do!

If I have to compare between the importance of bathing and eating, bathing would come on top. But it's a different case if it's a meal with delicately prepared food. Huh? Why is Charles blushing?

"What's wrong?"

"No, nothing! An-Anyway, go take a bath then, Ichika! Don't mind me, okay?"

"...Really?"

"Ye-Yeah."

"I'm going in then! Thanks Charles! I'll pay you back next time!"

Since she said this, it would be rude of me to I refuse her. Knowing that I can take a bath (in such a large bath to boot!) made me feel a lot better.

Thus, I moved to a place where Charles couldn't see and took it off. Though it's rather troublesome to put on the IS suit, it's easy for guys to take off their clothes. I'm not kidding. It didn't even take half the time it takes to wear them.

"I'm going in then."

"O-Okay, take your time."

I called Charles before I entered the bath, but for some reason, she sounded rather sheepish. Is she planning on pulling a prank? I hope not.

"WOW!"

It's huge! It's really huge.

There was a large bath in the room, 2 medium-sized baths that had massaging and air-bubbling functions respectively, and one hinoki bath. Furthermore, there was also a sauna, a body shower and even a waterfall-style massage water pillar. The facilities were perfect! It's great to live in Japan! Long Live Japan!

Wah, I'm feeling way too good now. I really want to use all the facilities of this bath. Anyone who doesn't feel excited about seeing this isn't a Japanese. No, isn't even human!

"Wait, hold on. Calm down. Haste won't make the cut. Let's just wash my body first."

Got to wash my body first, really.

"WAHAHAHAHAHA!!!"

IT'S ALRIGHT TO SHOUT HERE! THIS IS A LARGE BATH AFTER ALL! (Note: all good kids shouldn't try this.)

I held back my exhilaration as I hurriedly washed my body and quickly washed off the soap. I had to wash once first, bath, wash another time, bath, and then get out. That's my policy. Though it's alright to not follow through the routine, I'd feel better if I do, so I would often follow my routine.

After washing my body, I soaked my entire body into the bath pool that I oh so awaited.

"Hoo~"

Ahh, this relaxing feeling that spreads through my body. The tired feeling of fatigue and stiff body, and the relaxing feeling the steam brings to remove them...as I continued to relax my body, I try to remove all the thoughts in my mind. I don't want to think about anything. I just want to enjoy the bath on my own.

"Ah~! I'M REVIVED~"

REVIVED~REVIVED~REVIVED~...

As expected of a large bath, even the echoes are nice to hear. Hm, this is just like an onsen that promotes the importance of a bath. I should stick a gold star and then pin it up.

Thus, as I continued to soak in the pool, I soon forgot about the time, and a sleeping sensation gradually struck me. Maybe it was because I was tired, as the sleep monster carried me away after I relaxed.

(Ahh...I'll really sleep at this rate.)

I'll drown at this rate. This isn't good.

Shashasha...

(...? Is it my imagination? I seem to hear the door to the changing room opening...)

But my mind's really fuzzy now. Maybe it's just my imagiantion.

Patapatapata.

I heard a pair of beautiful legs walking on the wet marble.

The reason why I knew that was because it sounded beautiful. The source of the beautiful sound would most likely indicate that it was beautiful. Heh~

"I-I'm coming in..."

"!!"

I quickly raised the face that was half-soaked in water, and on the other side of the steam, I saw a completely naked Charles.

Of course, she had a towel wrapped around her, but it was a thin sports towel. The color of the skin behind could roughly be seen, and because of the backlight, I could see the body curves extremely clearly.

"Wh-Wha-What!?"

"...Do-Don't look! Ichika no ecchi..."

"So-Sorry!"

AHHH, why must I say sorry!!?

—AHHH!! I don't understand, but I better apologise!

Then, I quickly turned right at a rotation speed that could match an IS. The human body sure is amazing!

"Wh-Wha-What? Why are you here! Ah, I did ask you to come in, but that was when I was not in—why did you come in, Charles-san?"

Ahh, not good. My mind is in a mess now. Though I know what sort of situation I am in now, I couldn't control it now—or rather, how am I going to control myself now? Who could bring together, the gathering of a poltergeist? If there's one in the bathroom—yikes!

"You, you don't like...to be...with me...?"

"No, that's not it!"

That's not a case of liking someone or not. If I have to say it, I'm troubled! That's right, I am troubled! I'm a healthy 15 year old boy, and I have an interest in the opposite gender like others. I'd be lying if I said that I am not excited.

And at this moment, I'm in this large and sealed room (with high temperatures and echoes to boot) alone with a naked girl. This isn't good. I don't find that it's good at all . Right now, I can somewhat hear Charles breathing behind me, causing my heart to beat wildly.

"I still felt that it's better to come take a bath—if you, you're bothered by this. I'll just get out. Is it okay?"

"I-It-It's alright. I'll come out instead. I got enough of it, and besides—"

"WA-WAIT!"

She suddenly shouted for me to stop, and I stopped due to the shock.

"We-Well, I have something to say! It's important, so I hope that Ichika can listen..."

"I, I understand..."

If she has something important to say to me, I have to listen. Thus, I put my body that got up back into the bath pool.

But naturally, I couldn't stare at Charles, so I could only turn to the right side of the bath and listen to her with my back facing her.

"Well...do you still remember what you just said?"

"What I said before...are you talking about staying in the Academy?"

"Yes, that...well, I intend to stay here. Because I don't have any place to live, and..."

"An-And what?"

"..."

For some reason, she answered with silence. Our conversation suddenly stopped, and the entire bath went silent.

Plop.

"Kyah!"

"Wh-What's wrong?"

She just let out a cute sound, causing my voice to panic as well.

"I, I just got a water droplet on me...just scared me."

"Is, is that so..."

"..."

"..."

And then, the silence continued. The water droplets that would occasionally drop from the ceiling seemed to feel abnormally large.

Swoosh...

"Charles?"

As I heard the sound of water moving about in the pool, I turned my face to the source of the water instinctively.

"Do-Don't look here! Turn around!"

"So-Sorry!"

Though the steam was thick, both of us were less than 1 meter apart, so I could clearly see Charles facing me.

(Wh-What is she trying to do? No, is blood gushing into my head? I feel dizzy...)

But my wavering consciousness got shook up at the next moment.

Swoosh. Charles used her hands to touch my back.

"Cha-Charles—"

Her hands were hugging me from behind, and her slender body was pressing onto my back. My heart was pounding like crazy, it was as if it was about to jump out of my mouth.

"Ichika, I'll say it because it's here — I want to remain here because you are here."

"I, I see..."

Though it's nothing much to me, I find that it's enough that I could help Charles.

I feel that, depending on how the people around me treat me, I would treat them back in the same way. If others are to protect me gently, I wish to give the same gentleness to them and protect them. That's what I think.

"Also, that...I decided on something."

"Something...?"

"Yup, how I ought to live. Ichika taught me that, right?
"

"Is, is that so?"

"Yeah. Fuuf, it seems like Ichika's so slow-witted whenever he's involved, that it's really irritating!"

"We-Well...sorry about that."

"It's alright, I forgive you. But can you call me Charlotte from now on? Just call me that when we're alone together."

"That's your real...?"

"Yes. My name. Mother gave it to me, my real name."

"I got it, Charlotte."

"Mn."

Charles—no, Charlotte happily answered like, as naive as a child. I could immediately imagine her completely worry-free expression.

"Th-Tha-That's right, well...if we continue to remain in this position, to be honest, something bad may happen..."

Though I didn't realise just now, when I noticed the parts she and I were sticking together, it couldn't be helped that I was mindful of the lumps on my back.

The size should be ordinary, but the springy-ness shape is rather good—WHAT IN THE WORLD AM I THINKING!!??

"Ah, ahh, oh! That's right! I, I have...to wash my body and hair first!"

Charlotte finally seemed to notice her situation as she got away from me with water splatting sounds, standing up from the pool.

"Do-Don't look here, okay!?"

"I, I won't..."

"...It would be alright even if you looked..."

She finally seemed to mutter something, but as the water splatters were too loud, I couldn't hear it.

Then, Charlotte and I continued to wash and bath, and then we left the bath after relaxing for 30 minutes.

—OF course, we put on our clothes separately. While I waited, Charlotte was putting on her clothes.

Guys just need a moment to put on their clothes, and I'm done—look, I'm done.

"Let's go back then."

"Mn."

Charlotte nods her head. Her head's flushed red, maybe because she just bathed.

Though she was wearing the bra as per usual, the hair that was wet and combed back caused my heart to beat ridiculously for some reason.

After returning to the room, we first talked about some pointless stuff, and then slept. I don't really remember what happened, maybe because I was too tired...maybe.

Let's just leave it as that.

The next, day, Charlotte didn't show up at homeroom.

'I'm going then'. That's what she said to me before she left when we were at the cafeteria. What happened?

I look around the classroom. Besides, Charlotte, Laura wasn't around either. She was probably still recovering due to the injuries yesterday. Either that, or she got taken by the teachers for questioning.

"Go-Good morning everyone..."

For some reason, Yamada-sensei tumbled as she walked into the classroom. Maybe she got severely affected by something early in the morning or something. Maybe her poached egg wasn't half-cooked or something ...that could make her feel so moody.

"Orimura-kun. I don't know what you were thinking, but you can't treat me as a kid! Sensei's angry. Haa..."

She's angry...but not forceful. That's all. Sorry sensei.

"Uhm, today...I will be introducing a new student. Umm..."

I really can't understand Yamada-sensei's introduce... what? Transfer student?

My classmates seem to respond at the same time, as there's a commotion. It's already this late into the term, and we already had two transfer students. Another one? What's going on?

"Okay, please enter."

"Sorry to intrude."

Huh? This voice is--

"I'm Charlotte Dunois. Everyone, it's nice to see you."

Wearing a dress, Charlotte gives a deep bow. Including me, everyone in the class is stunned, but they still bowed back politely.

"Erm, Dunois-kun san is actually Dunois-san, just like that. Haa...I have to reassign dorms again..."

I see, so sensei's bothered about this.

...Hold, on, a, minute!

"Wha? Dunois-kun was a girl...?"

"I always knew that it's weird! She's not a bishounen, but a bishoujo."[2D 4]

"Hey, Orimura-kun, you were sharing a room together , don't tell me--"

"Wait a minute! I remember the bath was being used by the guys yesterday!?"

Zawazawazawazza! The buzzing surrounded the entire room, and the next moment, it rushed out.

--Ah not good. I have a bad feeling about this.

BAM! The classroom door looked like it got kicked down.

"IIICCHHIIIKKKAAA~!!!"

Crashing in and saying hello was Huang Lingyin. Her expression was showing rage that was like burning fire, and there seemed to be a dragon behind her. Ahh, this is the 4,000 year old history of China!

"GO AND DIE!"

She deployed the IS armor and opened the [Impact Cannons] on both shoulders with full force.

--Ah, I'm sooo going to die now--

Tomorrow's headlines will be decided.

"A 1st year high school male student was unfortunately killed by a girl of the same year. His body was completely blown to bits, and the classmates screamed out in shock."

'MEAT SAUCE!' 'TOMATO SAUCE' 'A PERSIMMON DROPPED ONTO THE GROUND!' 'A FIG!' 'A TRASHED CAN OF COKE!' 'OR PES(beep)COLA!'

Hey, the last two are the same--

BZZT!

"FU-AH, FU--AH, FU--AH!"

Rin's shoulders were rising and dropping due to anger , and she looked like a cat who was so angry that the fur was standing up--hm...huh? I'm...still alive...? I'm still alive?

"..."

I don't know if it was at the last second, but the one who arrived in between Rin and me was--that Laura.

She was covered in the black IS [Schwarzer Regen]. Maybe she used the AIC she specializes in to negate the impact waves, but on closer look, that large railgun wasn't there.

"Thanks for saving me...is your IS repaired? That's amazing."

"...Luckily, the core's alright, so I just used spare parts to reassemble it."

"Oh, I see--bku!?"

Suddenly--

Really, out of a sudden, Laura grabbed my chest and pulled me to her before--kissing me forcefully.

"!?!?!?!?"

SHOCKING NEWS! Can someone tell me what happened? Including Rin, everyone present widened their mouths in shock. They're showing the same expression; me too.

"You, you're going to be my bride! It's decided! I won't allow any objections!"

"Bride? Not groom?"

Being extremely confused, I commented calmly. Maybe I'm really a great artiste--okay, that's enough of my own ecstasy.

"I heard that the Japanese customs would say to the ones they like 'yome ni suru'[2D 5], so you're my bride."

Who told her all these rubbish!? Hey! Call the one responsible for this!

--Hn?

"Y-Yo-You...!"

Stuttering as she opened her mouth, Rin could only sputter some sounds like a goldfish. But for some reason, I couldn't get rid of the sense of danger. It's just like a goldfish sensor. Hold on.

"YOOOUUUU BBBBAAAASSSSTTTAAARRRRDDDD!!!"

KLANG! She activated the [Impact Cannons] again.

"HOLD ON A MINUTE! IT'S NOT MY FAULT! I'M THE VICTIM HERE!!!"

"IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT! ALL! ABSOLUTELY!! ALL YOUR FFFAAAAULLLLLTTT!!!"

THAT'S TOO UNREASONABLE!

But it seems like I can't talk sense into her. As I could feel my own life in danger, I tried to escape through the back door of the classroom.

Bhew--!

The laser grazes my nosetip, and I tremble as I turn around.

"Oh my, Ichika-san? Where are you going? I got something to say to you, you know? Well, it may be sudden, but it's necessary. Ohohohohoho..."

Eek! Cecilia has 1, 2, 3...at least 5 ruptured blood vessels! She's slowly getting up, the [Starlight Mk III] in her hands, the particles of light are forming BITs on her back. Too late, the IS armor is covering her body.

Things just got worse!

I gave up on escaping through the corridor and turned to the windows. As this is the 2nd level, I can just jump down. In the worst case scenario, I just need to deploy [Byakushiki]--

DON!

And right now(nanto)--here it goes (kanto). The south's (nanto) really great, and I mean exactly as what it indicates. It's good to complete it (kanto), and I mean exactly as what it indicates.

I got a katana stabbed right in front of me. Huh, is this the Sengoku era[2D 6]? Sengoku IS Academy...or something like that? Though it's not important, but Yodogimi's IS must be pretty powerful, I guess.

"...Ichika, how do you intend to explain?"

"HOLD IT HOLD IT HOLD IT! I'M THE ONE WHO WANTS AN EXPLANATION--OWOAH!"

I'M TOO LAZY TO LISTEN! The sharp slash echoed these words as it assaults me. AHH, YOU IDIOT! STOP IT! DO YOU WANT ME TO DIE!? STOP IT YOU IDIOT!

NO NO NO! I'll really die if this keeps up, so I bent my body down to escape without address--damn it, I don't even know what I'm saying now.

BAM!

"Huh?"

I knocked into someone. Who's that? I half-instinctively lifted my head.

"..."

It's Charlotte.

"Nikotsu."

"Ni-Nikotsu."

Ahh, is this the so-called angelic smile? It's like a buddha in hell, so I return an angelic smile at her. I'm rather good myself.

"I'm pretty shocked Ichika actually kissed another girl in front of me!"

"Well--...Charlotte? I was kissed, and I did not kiss someone. And why are you deploying your IS?"

"I wonder why."

[Rapid switch]--it doesn't really look necessary, as Charlotte didn't summon any weapons onto her hands.

That's right. That's because her strongest weapon and armor is deployed, so she doesn't need any other weapons.

PAM! With the sound of gunpowder exploding, the shield dropped off to show the .69 caliber battering ram [Gray Scale], also known as [Shield Pierce].

"Ha, haha, hahaha..."

When humans go past the limits, it seems like they can only laugh--a musician said this. Right, that's right...!

*

DOKAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA--!!!*

In this homeroom period today, loud noises, huge explosions, and continuous impacts shake the classroom as what the words indicate.

Epilogue: From the Crimson's Deep Sleep

"Hm—..."

It really was a mysterious area.

There was machinery stuffed all over the room, and the cables extended out like roots.

Moving up the metal, shaped like cables, was a mechanical mouse, and sometimes, screws could be heard dropping like rubber fruits.

Tatatatatatatata, it sounded like how ordinary people would use the keyboard to key in data in the first.

This was the only place in the world that had a squirrel that identified extraneous parts, analyzed the design, took it in and formed another shape.

Yes, this was Shinonono Tabane's secret base.

"Oh—okay—"

Kla, *kla*....

Kakakakakaka....

"Oh~"

Shinonono Tabane looked a lot more weirder than before.

She was wearing a western dress that was as blue as the sky, just like Alice in 'Alice in Wonderland'. The apron and the huge butterfly now behind her was also eye-catching.

As expected of Houki's own older sister, they were similar in appearance. However, what made them greatly different from each other was that Houki had bright, piercing eyes, while Tabane's eyes were lethargic looking due to lack of sleep. There were several years of black rings gathered below her eyes.

This may be what people meant by 'Geniuses can't be liberated from their thoughts'. Her dreamland got taken by the time spent in experiments, and thus she had never experienced sleeping soundly for once. Tabane didn't even know what a real sleep should be like.

Tabane was different from her sister. She didn't know any kind of sports, let alone kendo, and she had never done that before. But her body was very streamlined and curvy.

And what was most eye-catching were those huge breasts of hers.

The buttons on her chest were about to burst open, probably due to the misfit in size. Through the gap of the white shirt, one could see the tempting skin color of the woman.

Also, the hairband on her head could also be considered a problem. She had white bunny ears on them...basically, she had completely gotten into the role of 'Alice in Wonderland'.

It was already weird to dress up like Alice and a white bunny at the same time, but that was Tabane's interest, and the clothing she liked. Last month, she dressed up as all the characters in 'Hansel and Gretel'. Needless to say, that looked ridiculous.

And Tabane, who was dressed up like this, was waiting on the strange chair.

It may be weird to describe it as a chair, but it could only be described as that.

The silver chair was giving off a silver glow, and the body of the chair was large and curved, surrounding Tabane's body like a cage. It looked like a fossilized dinsosaur.

And Tabane just needed to move a finger, and the cables linked on the top would let the mechanisms move.

Kla, *kla*...

Kakakakakakaka....

Once she moved the fingertips slightly, each part of the chair moved like they were alive as they gave the orders to the small mechanical hands. And right now, the mechanical hands were quickly moving their tweezers to assemble smaller parts.

The chair was assembling something, attaching smaller parts with even smaller mechanical hands.

After repeating the process numerous times, they finally stopped, and what was formed was a plastic IS model that was created from nano-units.

It was weird, and useless, and it was so stupid that anyone would want to give her a punch. This was probably what 'wasting time' meant to her.

"Ah—done."

It was complete! The painting and the surface streamlining were perfect. Tabane said so in a bored manner and walked out of the chair.

The chair was tightly packed together, and there was no sign of it crumbling, but it would immediately crumble once Tabane touched it, forming a hill of spare parts.

"H—n...I'm bored, bored."

Tulalatulalala~♪

The Godfather's theme rang[2E 1]. This is a famous theme hoodlums entering the new century would use, but the composer[2E 2] most probably did not expect

someone in the Far East to love this song. To be honest, it would be interesting to see whether the composer would be extremely happy or sigh about this if he knew about it .

"This, this ringtone is...ha!"

A large jump, or rather, she jumped at her handphone in a diving like manner. Tabane didn't mind that her mug and toolbox got scattered all over the place as she immediately brought the handphone to her ear.

"Hello, Hi hi? Every day!"[2E 3]

Du *Du*—the line's cut in both ways.

"Wah—wait wait!"

Maybe it was Tabane's wish coming through or some divine prank as the handphone rangs again * Tulalatulalala~♪*.

"Hello!—This is everyone's favorite idol Shinonono Tabane—wait wait! Chi-chan!"

"Don't you call me that."

"OK, Chi-chan!"

"Sigh, whatever. I have something to ask you anyway."

"What is it?"

"Is it related to you this time?"

"This time, this time—what are you talking about?"

Tabane tilts her head. She's not feigning ignorance; she really doesn't know.

"I'm talking about the [VT system]."

"Ah, that? Ohhoho, Chi-chan, do you think I created that crude amateurish thing? I'm the perfectly flawless Shinonono Tabane. Besides, it's meaningless to create such a thing that's not perfect."

"..."

"Speaking of which, as for that research lab, I erased it from the surface of the earth more than 2 hours ago...oh, though you may know, the death count is zero. It's as

easy as breaking a child's hand—oh yeah, Chi-chan, is it hard to break one? Am I the only one thinking like this? Oh my, that's weird."

Ohohohoho, Tabane adds on a little laughter and smoothly brings this conversation to an end.

"Really? Sorry for disturbing you."

"No no, it's not a bother at all! As long as it's for Chi-chan, I'll service you a full 24 hours a day. I'm not a convenience store! But I'll gladly service you~"

"Alright, I'm hanging up then."

BAM! Chifuyu hung up the phone. It seemed like she wouldn't be calling back again. Tabane looked somewhat regretful as she again stared at the handphone , but 2 seconds later, she just threw it away without abandon.

"Oh my, Tabane's happy to hear a voice she hasn't heard in a long time! Chi-chan's still as amazing as ever, don't go running into the other side of the sunset."

Tabane folded her arms in front of her chest as she muttered, laughing away.

Orimura Chifuyu and Shinonono Tabane first met each other in elementary school, and after that, they were always in the same school and the same class. Of course, Tabane deliberately set that up, and Chifuyu knew that.

However, that wasn't all to their relationship.

The IS was released when Chifuyu was studying high school, and for the next few years, Chifuyu had been assisting in the IS development as a pilot.

In other words, what Chifuyu knew about IS already far surpassed the other pilots by a lot, and the comprehension level was on a completely different level. Because of all that training and unique skills, it wasn't a surprise that she became the 1st Mondo Grosso champion—at least that was what Tabane felt.

"But why did Chi-chan~ choose to retire?"

Even now, Tabane doesn't understand. In terms of age or ability, Chifuyu could still be a first-stringer if she returned to the squad, and she would immediately become a winning candidate in the next Mondo Grosso.

However, the human heart was complicated, weird and inexplicable. Even a genius' mind couldn't comprehend its depths.

—It was because of just that reason that she wanted to know. Tabane was only interested in 3 people in the world.

Tralala~♪ *Tralala~♪* You people better get ready~ BAM BAM! AH, ONII-CHAN! IF YOU WANT I'LL GIVE IT TO YOU!

Suddenly, another ringtone could be heard—yes, this ringtone's really weird. It's likely that among the million fans of 'The Yakuza Wives'[2E 4], Tabane is the only one who would use the BGM of a conversation in the movie as a ringtone. On a side note, the number of fans is just pure speculation, so there may be a large difference in numbers, please take note. However, Tabane wasn't a fan of this movie. It was a reaction she just does.

The folded bunny ears of hers straightened up, and this response far surpassed all words. Why would that

person call here? And for the first time! She already knew who the person was before she even picked up the phone .

"Oh my oh my oh my! Long time no see! I've always—always been waiting for you~!"

"...Nee-san."

"Yes yes, I know why you called. You want it, right? The one and only machine that you want — Houki-chan's personal machine. I did prepare it for you! It's the strongest and far surpasses all other specs, and it's even a match for the white one. And the name of that machine is...

[Akatsubaki]—!"

Afterwords

Hello hello everyone. We met again after the first volume came out of the market. I'm Yumizuru.

The ratings of the first IS volume was really good thanks to everyone, and the sales exceeded my expectations, so we're selling another volume again. I want to sincerely thank all the readers who bought the books. It's thanks to all of you, and in the future, I will continue to satisfy the demands all the readers place on me. For the time being, I'll be in your care.

And then now, it's now the second volume, and all the main female characters are gathered! Though there will be other female characters, including Charlotte and Laura, all the main cast have gathered (Basically)

Though it's somewhat mentioned at the end of the second volume, in the third volume that's coming out, Houki's sister, the inventor of IS, Shinonono Tabane will officially appear, and Houki will finally have her own personal machine! Please look forward to the developments! I'm really looking forward to Okiura-sensei's illustrations, I can't wait!

Speaking of which, many people often tell me that the setting of this novel is extremely detailed, that even the unnecessary parts are included. Well, I'm really a fan of detail, so this can't be helped. But basically, I already finished thinking of all the riddles and foreshadowing, so please relax!

On a side note, I would put write my ideas down into documents, so basically, the ideas for the outline has already amassed till half a novel's length.

But well--I can't really show others what to give up on or what to use...so I could only leave them in my brain. If I read it, I suppose I won't be able to understand as well, and may even have doubts like 'eh? it's supposed to happen like this?' Well, I did write all these anyway...

I still have a lot of stories I want to talk about, and in the future, I hope I can showcase them in a way where it's not too draggy. This will have to depend on my hard work and the readers' response, so please guide me through. However, if it's too boring, please tell me as well (laughs).

This time, Okiura-sensei helped me out with brilliant illustrations. I feel really honored and thankful, and

really, I want to thank all the assistance he put in for every volume.

Besides the illustrations that were put inside the book, there were also some blueprints and all sorts of ideas in them. I myself got more or less influenced to think of new ideas.

I experienced this 'external touch that's not of one's own' many times in my many years in the game development industries, and those will push anyone's works to ways that can't be reached on one's own.

Besides, the work is definitely not something that belongs to the author; it's something that can only be completed through many people's power and assistance. Of course, the readers are a part of it, so my duty is to find out what everyone wishes to see.

My job is to create, so I often have to remind myself not to think that 'this belongs only to me'. Though the work has my name on it, it's not something that belongs to me.

As there's still additional space, let me talk more about IS.

We--ll, actually, at the planning stage, IS was a completely different story. There was nothing similar in concept except for the IS, as the initial plan was to have 'a cross-dressing guy' (!).

(But the name of the protagonist hasn't changed, it's still Ichika, because I like it.)

Then, after discussing about the content with Misaka-san, the chief editor, he gave me a lot of ideas, and after that, I restructured it to form the current storyline of IS. (And after that, I even removed 3 designated settings, including the female lead Houki.)

Though the story's completely different from how I envisioned it, as I continue to write, I felt, 'this is rather interesting'. Actually, it's also because I really want to see that I thought 'lets write this book!'

Normally, I (at least during the time of planning) would normally write what I want to see, show it to others, ask others for illustrations and publish it. After passing through these phases, the work naturally became 'something that belongs to everyone'. Well, since it belonged to the author in the first place, this can't be helped.

However, I may start to incorporate all sorts of suggestions from the planning stage on.

The work involves a lot of people that allows others to add in their touch.

So in the future, I hope to create works with all sort of people.

Alright, we'll meet again in the 3rd volume. Goodbye!

--Yumizuru Izuru

A certain day in July, 2009.

Translation Notes and References

Chapter 1

1. ↑ One of many japanese terms used to refer to a big brother (actual or big brother figure, both)
2. ↑ In English
3. ↑ Idiot big brother
4. ↑ High social class ladies
5. ↑ の. A rough translation for it will be 'whatever/ anyhow'.
6. ↑ TL note: Ling Ling is the name of a panda in Japan Ueno zoo. It was from China, and exchanged with a Japanese born panda in 1992. The panda died in 2008 at the age of 22.
7. ↑ A reference to how Chinese movies are dubbed in Japanese. The Chinese characters in manga and novels would often have such a catchphrase
8. ↑ Another double entendre here (後ushirogami o hikareru): literal meaning: hair being pulled from behind, and the figurative meaning.

Chapter 2

1. ↑ One of many Japanese terms for "Mother". Replacing would not be good since there are so

many terms for it and the combination of the terms with the honorifics reveal the attachment, respect and love for the person.

2. ↑ 事, ,: Jijō, jijō, toppo)
3. ↑ In English: Under Siege - the movie
4. ↑ Silence of the Lamb
5. ↑ Similar to common sense but made up on the spur of the moment.
6. ↑ Ladies belonging to the upper class of society.
7. ↑ Noblesse Oblige

Chapter 3

1. ↑ "Ichika no echhi" can be translated to "Ichika, you perv/pervert" but since Charles uses it often it's left like this.
2. ↑ Original Text is: な (Romaji: Na, nande-ma-nai, nande-ma-nai-zo, nande-ma-nai-nda, nande-ma-nai ni-tōi-nai)
3. ↑ Houki's family
4. ↑ Japanese term for Rock-Paper-Scissors
5. ↑ The action used here is normally associated with the words "Come and get me if you dare/can". One famous example of its use is in The Matrix (franchise).

6. ↑ Japanese polite self reference word for males (ie: Same function as **I** except normally used by males to refer to themselves while speaking politely).
7. ↑ She was about to say that she wouldn't mind it if Ichika was to... but then got embarrassed.

Chapter 4

1. ↑ Rock-Paper-Scissors
2. ↑ Oni are demons and ogres of japanese folklore
3. ↑ 正, sounds similar to The Sacred Blacksimth (聖() Seiken no Burakkusumisu)
4. ↑ Bishounen means beautiful boy whereas bishoujo means beautiful girl. Both in the feminine sense (ie: Beautiful... not handsome).
5. ↑ 嫁, basically this is one of the forms a male uses to propose to a female. Basically it means "I'll make you my bride" or something along similar lines. Laura (and the person who taught her this) is ignorant/mistaken about proper japanese social customs hence her mistake.
6. ↑ The Sengoku era, also known as the Warring States period was a time in Japanese history in which social upheaval, political intrigue, and nearly

constant military conflict that lasted roughly from the middle of the 15th century to the beginning of the 17th century.

Epilogue

1. ↑ The Theme of the 1972 film "The Godfather"
2. ↑ The composer's name is Nino Rota.
3. ↑ もす (mosu mosu, hinemosu). The literal translation was written here. However as you can see by reading the original. The sentence is supposed to rhyme. In the anime, certain fansubbers chose to change the sentence slightly to "Hi Hi, are you high? " in order to keep the rhyming sense.
4. ↑ 極, gokudou no onna-tachi